THOUGHTS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR

BY THE REV. HANDLEY C. G. MOULE D.D.

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THOUGHTS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR

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THOUGHTS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR

By

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'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.'
Rev. i. 10.

LONDON
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
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TO THE HEART-UPLIFTING MEMORY

OF MY FRIEND,

NOW RESTING IN GOD,

G. H. C. MACGREGOR,

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED.

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Preface

OF the following short chapters the larger number were originally contributed in monthly succession to the *Sunday at Home*, as 'Thoughts for the Day of Days.' The remainder have been written since, to complete a series for the Sundays of the Year.

As the opening of the New Century coincided, in my work of periodical contribution, with that of the New Year, I made reference to it, as a matter of course. When revising my 'Thoughts' for the present volume, I decided to leave that reference as it stands; it will recall to my readers a memorable epoch, whose messages do not pass away with its occurrence.

Readers to whom the traditional sacred Seasons of the Year are, as they are to myself, a help to faith and hope, will find them here recognized in their succession. But I hope that this feature of the book will be found to be so managed as to be no intrusion on the attention of other Christians.

The preparation of this simple work has been a refreshment to my own heart and soul. Happy

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shall I be if in some humble measure its brief chapters may serve, under the blessing of the Lord of the Sabbath, to magnify His Name to His believing servants, and to endear to them more than ever that 'Day of rest and gladness,' the loving and reverent observance of which is of such inestimable value to the Church.

HANDLEY C. G. MOULE.

St Beatenberg, Switzerland,
July 9, 1901.

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I

My Presence shall go with thee

'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.' —Exod. xxxiii. 14.

THIS is the first Lord's Day of a New Year. It is more; for it is the first of a New Century. The transition is strange and moving as we pass such a boundary of time. Last Sunday we could still think of the 'seventeen hundreds' as 'last century.' The reign of Anne, the Pretenders' wars, the work of Wesley, the British conquests in India and Canada, the independence of the United States, the French Revolution, all still were grouped to our minds within that 'last century.' Now our long familiar 'eighteen hundreds' take that place. The imagination feels it. It is as if the past had moved abruptly further off, and the unknown future stood, in its solemn veil, closer at hand before us.

To be sure it is *imagination* which has most to do with this experience. But imagination is not nothing. It is a peculiar grouping of facts to our inner eye. And in this case the grouping is one which may deeply influence both thought and will,

as it brings so vividly before us the swift march of the things temporal towards the things which are eternal.

The first Sunday of the twentieth Christian century is a fitting day on which to listen to this great promise, spoken by the living Lord to His servant Moses, at a great crisis: 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.'

Exod. xxxiii. 14.

We well remember the occasion and the conditions. Moses was on the eve of a great and serious 'new departure.' The sin of the golden calf had darkened the whole scene, and he was looking forward to the future of his leadership of the unfaithful and restive people with a sinking heart. As a fact, though he did not know it yet, he had before him not merely a few difficult weeks or months, but years upon years of toil and care. The great Wandering would soon begin, of whose sorrowful annals we hear so little, but which must have put immense demands upon the prophet's patience and strength. Just now it is that he cries to his Heavenly Master in the sore need. He thinks of the future, and he cannot face it, except on one condition; the Lord must send with him His own supernatural aid. He must be admitted to 'know the Lord,' in the intercourse of access and friendship. He must be sure of His mighty favour; 'shew me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight.'

Exod. xxxiii. 13.

My Presence shall go with thee

Then came the answer: 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.'

How pregnant, how profound, are the terms of that assurance! The anxious man, encountering the difficult and the unknown, is to have with him in it the eternal Presence, and is to enjoy not only support and assistance but a wonderful Rest.

'*My Presence*'; literally, '*My Face.*' He was to have always with him a personal Companionship. He was to hold converse face to Face, eye to Eye, with One who was strong enough to meet all his demands for guidance, succour and strength. What he should enjoy should be no mere superintendence, as from a distant heaven. An everlasting Friend should travel with him along the desert, and sit with him in his tent, and accompany him to the council, and to the seat of justice, and amidst the rebellious concourse, and to the field of battle with heathen foes, giants and others, when the time should come. He should experience the infinite difference of being never alone, never without a personal Presence, perfectly sympathetic, and at the same time almighty.

'*I will give thee Rest.*' There are two possible sorts of rest. One is rest *after* toil, the lying down of the weary, at the end of the march, on the morrow of the battle, on the summit of the hill. The other is rest *in* toil, the internal and

deep repose and liberty of a spirit which has found a hidden refuge and retreat, where feeling is calm and disengaged, while the march, the battle, the climb, are still in full course. This last was the promise to Moses. Another day, a distant day, was to come when he should taste the endless rest *after* toil, when he should sink down on Pisgah in the arms of the Lord, and (to quote the beautiful legendary phrase) should die—if death it could be called—by His kiss. But now he was to taste the wonderful rest *in* toil. He was to traverse that last long third of his vast and memorable life, thinking, ruling, guiding, bearing, under the divine enabling condition of the inward rest of God, the peace of God, passing understanding.

To-day, looking out upon the new year and the new age, let us humbly claim the promise of Moses for ourselves. We may do so. For 'he that is least in the kingdom of heaven' has, in the Lord Jesus, a guaranteed assurance of nothing less. 'Lo, I am with you all the days.' 'We have access into the holiest.' 'The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'

Matt. xxviii. 20; Heb. x. 10; Phil. iv. 7

'E'en let the unknown to-morrow bring with it what it may,' while that promise is in our grasp. It may bring with it surprises of earthly joy, personal or domestic. It may bring unlooked for clearings away of dark public prospects, in state or in church. Or it may bring clouds, and storm,

and conflict, and what looks like confusion. But if the Presence goes with us we shall, in either event, have the Rest. Our life's week will have at its heart a perpetual Sabbath, on the way to the great and perfect 'Sabbath-keeping which remaineth for the people of God.' Heb. iv. 9

II

The Lord's Day

'The Lord's Day.'—Rev. i. 10.

IT is already the second Sunday of the New Year. Before we go another step along the holy days thus in prospect, let us pause to think a little of what is given to us in the gift of them, and to make before God some resolves about our use of the gift.

Think of our Sundays in advance. If (heart-solemnizing *if*!) we are permitted to see this new year through, it has some fifty of them still to bring us. They will come in their faithful and holy succession; the Sundays of the winter, short days and long evenings, with inclement skies not seldom, and biting frosts and driving rains. Then the Sundays of the opening spring, with their deep parables and bright memorials of resurrection-life and hope. Then the Sundays of the summer, glorious with the full life of the year, perhaps also, to some, trying and tiring, as their heat is felt in hours of labour in church, or school, or by the wayside. There will be the Sundays of our normal periods of life and work. There will be the Sundays of our intervals of holiday, precious in their

opportunities, yet also bringing their temptations to neglect and to misuse.

What shall we think of them as we look forward? We will, in the first place, solemnly recollect the inestimable value of the gift of them. Whatever differences there are (and they are many) between one life and another, as to the possibility of full Sabbath rest, at least there is this boon in the Sabbath for all Christian lives, that once every seven days recurs this great monument of 'the better things. Each Lord's Day is as it were a pillar on the path, where the path rises to a hill-top. And the pillar is inscribed with the eternal truths of God, of Christ, of Resurrection, of Holiness, of Worship, of the Word. And the hill-top commands a fresh prospect of 'that blessed Hope.' Like the pilgrims on the Delectable Mountains, we can look from it and see from its vantage-ground 'something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place' where the Christian is for ever with the Lord.

Titus ii. 13

Aye, the Lord's Day, the First Day of the Week, is itself a pledge and earnest of that coming glory. For why do we keep now the first day, not the seventh? For one reason, and one only; because 'Jesus died, *and rose again.*' And is not that resurrection the inalienable warrant that all His promises are true, and so that He shall come again, and His saints with Him? 'Till He come' is an inscription fit alike for the holy Table and for the holy Day.

1 Thess. iv. 14

Therefore we will personally resolve, the Lord helping, that we will be, to the best of our real power, keepers of the Lord's weekly Festival of rest and worship. It is no part of my duty here to lay down an impossible uniformity of rule for this in detail. Very tenderly would I think of the many Christians whose lives, under our difficult modern conditions, are so circumstanced that their Sabbath observance is, in this respect or that, sorrowfully hindered and limited by causes which
Rom. xiv. 4 are *really* out of their control. 'To their own Master they stand.' But I may, without fear of seeming uncharitable, or unduly stringent, appeal to every Christian reader to see to it, before God, that the hindrances to the full observance of the Day in his case *are really* out of his control. Let no lightly admitted reason of mere personal liking or comparative convenience come between him and a *diligent* attendance at Sabbath worship, remembering the evening as well as the morning. Let nothing short of a very real and grave necessity, I dare to say it, justify to him the use of public conveyances on the Sunday.[1] Let nothing make us careless, those of us who employ domestic service, about the call that lies

[1] I say this the more earnestly since an occasion when, addressing a gathering of railway-men, I remarked passingly that I never used the train on Sunday; their delight, loudly expressed, I shall never forget.

upon us to lighten the work of our households on Sunday in every way reasonably possible. Let us not lightly fall into the fast-advancing fashion of making no difference between our Sunday reading and that of the week-day. For myself, I cannot express the benefit, mental as well as spiritual, which I have derived from a life-long adherence, very 'narrow' as some might think it, to a careful rule of difference. Let any one who pleases use the word 'Sabbatarian' as a reproach. Profoundly sure I am that a 'Sabbatism,' not harsh nor gloomy, nay, the delightful opposite to such ideas, yet real and careful, is rich in manifold blessings for the man, for the home, for our whole society. Let us put ourselves upon its side.

I read not long ago, in a book where I had looked for nothing of the kind, an appeal for loyal reverence towards the Lord's Book and the Lord's Day. The appeal was based on national grounds. The writer affirmed that the Book and the Day are still *the* two sacred institutions in the English nation's view, and that it is of priceless benefit to the nation to foster and sustain that thought. Be it ours to aid the process, and more than ever so this coming year. But not for the nation only. For our own soul's sake, for our very life's sake, let us love, reverence, *and use*, in public, private, secret, the Lord's Holy Book, and also the Lord's ever-blessed Day.

III

Earnest Expectation and Hope

'According to my earnest expectation and my hope.'—Phil. i. 20.

STILL early as we are in the year, it seems natural and fitting to direct our Lord's Day thought to what lies in front, to what is sought, hoped for, worked for, in the future. To-day and next Sunday let us think a little of certain *ambitions* of the Christian man, some of the aims and desires after success and achievement with which he should look forward.

'Ambition' is a word which has been so much 'soiled with all ignoble use' that it seems at first sight out of place in Christian thought. Yet the word is used by the great Apostle, once and again. *Philotimia*, 'love of honour,' that is to say, ambition, is St. Paul's chosen word in, for example, 2 Cor. v. 9. There our Authorized Version reads,

2 Cor. v. 9 'We labour to be accepted of Him.' But the Greek is, literally, 'We are ambitious to be accepted.' Nor is there any wonder in this, when we come to reflect upon it. 'Honour' may be 'loved' with widely different motives. It may be

sought on grounds merely selfish, as selfish as possible; the one thought may be *my* success, *my* fame, *my* gain, *my* power. It may be sought on the other hand on grounds which, practically speaking, are pure and unselfish; certainly we can *conceive* such a seeking of it. Look at the ardent student at the University, striving for intellectual distinction that he may lay his honours at the feet of parent, or of schoolmaster. Look at the soldier in the field, resolved to 'distinguish himself' for England's sake, or so that his beloved and admired commander may win another victory with his aid.

May not the believer 'seek honour,' the honour which cometh, ultimately, from God only, 'the praise of the glory of His grace,' with the pure desire that fresh laurels may be added to the wreath of his victorious Lord? If so, he may be, nay he is called to be, ambitious.

The verse from the Philippian Epistle, at the head of this chapter, is exactly in point. Here the Apostle discloses to us his ambition; and what is it? It is, 'that *Christ should be magnified* in my body, whether it be by life or by death.' He is ambitious—for Him. He seeks success, he seeks honour. He is all alive with the hope of living, and dying, so that notice shall be taken of his life and of his death. He is ambitious of a course of action or suffering that shall be, in one important aspect, anything but common-place, for it shall be

Phil. i. 20

seen to have God in it. But why? That the world may think that Paul is great? Nay rather, that it may see that Christ is glorious. Paul's ambition is to be as the lens which 'magnifies' the heavenly body to the astronomer; he wants to bring Christ nearer, and to show Christ more resplendent, to the eyes of men around him. In order to this, he desires *himself* to live and die in no common way. He is ambitious. But it is for his Lord.

Reader, I earnestly call you, as before God I call myself, to this 'ambition' in view of our New Year. Think of the possibilities for this purpose which the months to come contain, if we will but watch them, and use them. Who shall attempt to calculate the ways, and the occasions, for the 'magnification of Christ in our body,' which this year will develope for us as we go on? What moments for the display of His presence in us, in the common things of common life, will it not bring? For the life we are ambitious of, while it is to be so far from common-place, may have to be lived in the pathway of common things. Not so much in the doing of conspicuous deeds, as in the doing of all deeds in the sweet grace of God, is He to be magnified in us. What beautiful victories of patience, of self-abnegation, of love, may not the Holy One win in us this year! What lovely achievements of faithful service, of unselfish

painstaking! What winning testimonies may be borne for Him, in which we shall so confess His Name as *obviously* to be, not advertizing ourselves, but disclosing what He has become to us!

Perhaps the year may bring us some 'great thing' to do, or to suffer, for His name's sake. If we are wise, if we are near to God, we shall not *ask* for such 'great things,' as if we would rather have them for our lot than the little things which often test us more. But He may choose them for us. If so, we shall be best prepared for them by being found 'faithful,' faithfully ambitious for His sake, 'in that which is least.' And we will remember all along that the whole process must be carried out not only in our spirit but 'in our *body*'; that is to say, not in sentiment only, however spiritual and beautiful, but in action and intercourse, in whatever way these may be conditioned. It is through *the body*, and the body only, that we serve others, and influence others, as we shall soon realize upon reflection. So we must, in a holy ambition, 'present *our bodies* a living sacrifice, for a reasonable service.'

So we pass onward into the year, 'loving honour,' full of ambition, in quest of success, for the sake of Him 'who loved us, and gave Himself for us.'

IV

More and More

'More and more.'—1 Thess. iv. 1.

LAST Sunday we meditated a little upon the ambition of a Christian. Let us give the subject a little further thought to-day, that our New Year, for it is still new, may be the better used for our ambitious purposes.

Here is a phrase full of ambition: 'More and more.' It suggests at once the familiar fact of the eager and grasping character of ambition. Who does not know how proverbially the ambitious are never content? It is a familiar story, that of the young Romanist student who was asked what his hopes and wishes were. He looked forward ere long to the priesthood. Then, quite possibly, his diligence and devotion would lead him up in due season to the bishop's mitre. Was that enough? No; he was bold enough to think of the archiepiscopal dignity as another step that might be taken. Was that enough? No; it was conceivable that the Holy Father might call him to the peculiar honours of a cardinal. And then? Why then, it was the cardinals' function, when the Holy

Father died, to elect one of their number to be his successor; and who could tell ——? And then? Then, says the story, the young man held his peace, and thought, and sighed. And another version of it adds that he died at twenty-five.

Here is indeed 'the vanity of human wishes.' But I quote it now to illustrate not the vanity, but the wishes, the human instinct of desire for 'more and more.' That instinct is not in itself evil, though it may be as evil as possible in its application. In itself, it is no more than one indication, among many others, that man was made for boundless development and growth in the scope and use of his life. There is that in him which by nature, not necessarily by sin, tends to look ever onward and to ask for more. The sin comes in only when the tendency is ruled by self-will and self-love, and seeks its object for ends divorced from the will of God. 'Grace,' it has been well said, 'does not destroy our natural instincts, but glorifies them.' So it is with this instinctive asking for 'more and more.'

How often the thought, 'more and more,' meets us in the Word of God! 'The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' Prov. iv. 18
'The Lord shall increase you more and more.' Psal. cxv. 14
Here, in the chapter of our text, we have it twice over: 'We exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and 1 Thess. iv.

to please God, so ye would abound more and
ver. 1 more'; 'Ye love one another . . . but we beseech
ver. 9, 10 you, brethren, that ye increase more and more. And where this precise phrase is not used, its equivalents continually occur, as for instance in all the many passages where we are called to be always 'growing,' 'growing in grace, and in the
2 Pet. iii. knowledge of our Lord,' and where we read of
18 advances 'from faith to faith,' 'from glory to glory,' and the like. The Bible is full of the promise, and of the ambition, of growth.

It is a deep law of the spiritual life. A merely stationary spiritual condition is hardly conceivable; to be stationary must imply something already of loss and decline. 'The man who says *enough*,' remarks Augustine, 'is a lost man.' Awful words, which must be read with some obvious qualifications. But they point us to a real danger-signal, though they do so with a stern grasp upon our arm.

Let us, for our own soul's sake, as well as for our Lord's, and for our brethren's, be ambitious of 'more and more.' Let us be always grasping, covetous, unsatisfied, in the desire for a growth which means nothing if it does not mean more of HIM.

'O Jesus Christ, *grow* Thou in me,
And all things else recede;
My heart be daily *nearer* Thee,
From sin be daily freed.'

What, after all, is the great requisite to this 'more and more,' and what accordingly will be its manifestations? To answer the last question first: it will show itself above all, as this passage of 1 Thessalonians reminds us, in a deeper desire 'to walk and to please God,' and in a truer, warmer 'love one to another'; words equally simple and profound, as we look into them with prayer. It may or may not show itself in enlarged outward influence and enterprise. Nay, the day will come, if we live long, when in *that* respect the experience will be 'less and less.' Brain, eyes, tongue, hands, feet, will 'less and less' serve us. Perhaps at length we shall be shut up to a sick-room, to a sick-bed, quietly to fade and die. But the spiritual 'more and more' may be, and shall be, a prospect of immortal growth. 'The outward man doth perish, but the inward man is renewed day by day.' Which of us has not known the aged saint who, bodily, could scarcely totter, but, spiritually, 'mounted up with wings like the eagle,' loving, praising, manifesting Christ, 'more and more,' till the immortal spirit passed upward to the immortal scene?

1 Thess iv. 1

2 Cor. iv. 16

To such a 'more and more,' what is the grand requisite? It is simply the divine secret; more of Christ. What will secure the blessed ones in Heaven, through their endless life, from the very possibility of decay, and enable them for an

eternal 'more and more' of love, and joy, and service? Simply, the being 'for ever *with the Lord*,' who is their life. That same secret, in its measure, is the talisman here below for the 'more and more' of holy ambition in His name.

2 Cor. iii. 18 'Beholding His glory, we are being transformed from glory to glory, as by His Spirit.' We shall never decline, we shall ever grow, in the deep life of grace, unto the end, if we are faithful to our call to grow in the knowledge of Him who lives for us and in us, to grow in closeness of communion with Him, to 'press towards the things which are still before' in the bright depths of His Person, Work, and Love.

V

Adorning the Doctrine

'That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.'—Titus ii. 10.

THE connexion of these words is noteworthy. Paul is instructing Titus what to say to that element in the Cretan mission congregations which consisted of slaves. No one can read the Epistles without realizing how considerable that element was all over the rising Christian world; again and again St. Paul devotes special instructions to the slave-converts, notably when writing to Corinth, to Ephesus, to Colossæ. St. Peter, in his First Epistle, addresses them in a passage full of the tenderest sympathy and deepest spiritual truth. But of all these allusions to the slaves none is more striking in some respects than this in the Epistle to Titus. For these slaves were Cretans, or living in Crete, and St. Paul himself reminds us how bad a reputation Crete bore for the low type of its national character, untruthful, cruel, selfish, indolent. A Cretan master, like other slave-owners of the ancient world, was the almost irresponsible despot of his slave; a formidable

1 Peter ii. 18-25

Tit. i. 12

despot he too often must have been. Legree, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, probably represents the Cretan character not unworthily, at least in its ferocity and selfishness. And even a Legree, in the slave-states of America, had heard of the Lord Jesus, and inherited some influences, however faint, from Christianity—an inheritance unknown to the pagan Cretan.

How impressive, when we remember this, is
Tit. ii. 10 this appeal to 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things'! The Apostle calls upon them, not only to do right, to tell the truth, to be faithful in every trust, to see that their answers, even to harshest speech, were modest and Christian. The right deed was to be done not rightly only, but beautifully. It was to be done so as to show that the divine principle of life was not only strong but lovely. They were to 'adorn the doctrine.'

It was a great demand. It was an appeal to people whose walk always led them through the busiest and stoniest paths of life, to walk there with dignity and grace. It asked the slave-Christian to find a secret which should enable him so to rise above himself and his surroundings that there should be something in him and about him positively winning. He was to live so that others should wish to be like him, because they should be so impressed by the comeliness

of his character, and, through it, by the comeliness of his creed.

It is hardly necessary to point out at any length the moral of this simple but most noble passage. It speaks for itself. If the Cretan slave, himself quite recently as little Christlike as his heathen owner, was called upon to live a beautiful life on Gospel principles, how much more are we, with all our English circumstances, called upon so to live! Let it lie then prominent among our Christian ambitions to do so; let us covet, day by day, to 'adorn the doctrine.'

I remember hearing an old friend, long ago, speaking (in no uncharitable strain) of a neighbour, say, 'I am sure he is a Christian, but he is a rather disagreeable one.' He meant, I gathered, that this person took no pains at all to 'adorn the doctrine.' He worshipped God in Christ; he recognized his own sinfulness and need; he trusted his Saviour for pardon, and strove in His name to lead a pure and honest life. But it never occurred to him—at least it did not seem to do so—that part of his duty to his Lord was to learn at His feet the kindliness, the gentleness, the sympathy, the considerateness, which win and are attractive for Him. Let us see to it that we are not classed, by fair criticism, among 'disagreeable Christians.'

If we recognize, as we should do, that the

blessed Gospel is intended not only to rescue us, but to mould us, to impart a noble impress to our character, we shall surely give a leading place in our thoughts to this call so to live as to 'adorn the doctrine.' We shall take loving pains about it; we shall think and pray about it. Perhaps above all things, in this direction, we shall study the blessed art of considerateness in the common things of the common day. We shall remember that two obvious items of Christian duty are to take trouble and to save trouble. We shall pray for the gift and grace to 'look upon the things of others,' and to look at them, in an important sense, through the eyes of others, putting ourselves in their place.

Phil. ii. 5 This, as we well know, was 'the mind that was in Christ Jesus.' And they will soonest catch it who, believing in Him, live much with Him.

VI

The Master's Scrutiny of His Servants

'For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body.'—2 Cor. v. 10.

A SLIGHT change or two in translation will help us the better to grasp the bearing of these words. 'We must all appear' may better be read, 'we must all be displayed,' or 'manifested.' The thought is not merely that of attending at a summons, of putting in an appearance. It is that of being disclosed, examined, under a broad light, so as to seem just what we are. Again, 'the things done in the body' should rather be read, 'the things done through the body;' this is the only literal rendering of the Greek. The thought is of the body as the implement of action, the vehicle of faculties and energies, the talent, so to speak, which has been laid out and used.

Thus translated, and put into connexion with the previous verse, our passage stands out with a distinctive message of its own. The Apostle has just expressed a deep purpose of his life; it is that, 'whether present or absent,' that is 2 Cor. v. 9

to say, whether out of the body or in it when the Lord calls him to examination, he may be 'accepted of Him,' or again to render more literally, may 'meet with His approval.' This is his 'ambition.' For this is one of the passages where the Greek equivalent to 'ambition' occurs; 'wherefore we are ambitious,' is the precisely literal translation. Now he expands that prospect and its conditions in the verse before us. He anticipates a definite occasion on which may be expressed the 'approval' of which he is 'ambitious.' There is coming a time when his Lord will summon him, as He will summon all who serve Him, to a 'judgment-seat,' where a scrutiny will be conducted into what has been 'done through the body,' and at which the Lord will express His opinion of the doing, and will award accordingly.

If I interpret this passage aright, it does not refer to the great general judgment, but to what we may describe as a domestic court, concerned not with a nation but with a household, and which conducts its solemn business within the walls of home. It does not refer to the all-important question of the Christian's acceptance before the Holy One in his Redeemer's merits; that is another matter, and is, I think, taken for granted all through this context. Rather it refers to the saved servant's use of his Master's

gifts in his Master's service; to the enquiry into what, during his allotted span of life here below, he has 'gained by trading.' The person is a genuine member of the family and household of salvation. He is saved by faith. But as he was saved, not only to be safe, but to serve the purposes of his Saviour, he has to be examined about his works. And so his ambition is that he may have the joy, the bliss, of the great Examiner's approval; 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' Matt. xxv. 21

Thus viewed, the passage finds a striking parallel in 1 Cor. iii. 11-15. There we have the thought of a fiery test to be applied hereafter, not to the persons but to the works of labourers for God. All are supposed to have 'built upon the foundation.' All are supposed to be 'saved.' But how they have worked, what they have done as builders for the King, is, nevertheless, put to test. Have they piled up a structure of precious metal and precious stones, or have they reared what is only fit to be food for the fire? 'Of what sort' has been their work? Accordingly as 'the fire' answers that query, so does the worker, as a worker, 'receive' or not receive a 'reward'; he hears or he does not hear, 'Well done, good and faithful.'

What shall he say to these things? Humbly, thankfully, lovingly, we will first remember that

the Master who will preside at the scrutiny is at the same time the Lord who loves us and who gave Himself for us. To Him His unworthiest workman is unspeakably dear, with that love which springs unbought in a Saviour's heart. He will never be harsh, He will never be unfair. He will forget no extenuation, He will have understood every difficulty. Nevertheless, His eyes will be quite open, and He will express His entire opinion upon what we have done through the body.

And His opinion will be followed, assuredly, by results which will somehow affect the experiences of the servant even in the world of light and immortality. So, in St. Paul's words just following, literally rendered, 'we know the fear of the Lord.' We recognize, we realize, the solemnity of the prospect of that scrutiny. We recall it when we are tempted to misuse 'the body,' to forget the responsibility we have with these lips, and eyes, and hands, and feet, and brain. But our last thought, as we remember how our passage stands connected, shall not, after all, be one only of 'fear.' Rather it shall be full of a bright 'ambition.' Delightful call, to use these bodies, in which we live and move, so happily, so habitually, *for Him*, by His grace alone, that 'Well done, good and faithful' shall be the voice of the beloved Master when He holds His domestic court.

2 Cor. v. 11

VII

Eternal Service

'Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.'—Matt. xxv. 21.

WE thought last week of that examination of our work for Him which is to be held hereafter by the Lord Jesus Christ our Master. We studied that prospect in the words of one of the greatest of His servants. To-day we take up a prospect closely connected with that other, and it is opened to us in words of the Master's own.

The scrutiny is supposed to have taken place. 'The Lord of the servants' has ascertained what they have 'done through' the property He has entrusted to them, the golden 'talents,' the wealth of faculty and opportunity, whatever it has been. And the man in this case has 'met with His approval.' His employment of the means for service has been satisfactory. Now comes the allotment of reward.

And that reward takes two remarkable aspects, deeply connected, yet distinct. The man is to enter 'into the joy of his Lord.' And also he is to continue in his Master's service; he is to serve

Him for ever, and to serve Him more than ever; 'I will make thee ruler over many things.'

So one side of the prospect of the eternal life is this; it is to be a life of serving God. And this, not only in the sense of the service of worship, which we see referred to in the
Rev. vii. 14 glorious words, 'they serve Him day and night in His temple.' No, the allusion here is to the service of active, positive, responsible labour. The man who has 'traded with the talent' on earth is somehow to have his Master's interests entrusted to him in heaven. 'I will make thee ruler over many things.'

Wonderful prospect, with its contrast between 'few' and 'many.' Perhaps the servant had to do with what seemed 'a few things'; he was perhaps weak, indigent, unintelligent, limited in a hundred ways, set to work in an area bounded, it may be, by the walls of a cottage, or of a poor and bare sick-room. On the other hand, 'the things' may have seemed to be by no means 'few'; the servant may have had to administer a province, a kingdom, to lead a mighty movement for God, to influence generations by his words. Or again, his place may have lain somewhere in the midst; there may have been nothing at all remarkable, this way or that, in his lot and in his scale of service. But in every case such shall the future be that the heavenly work shall

be thus described relatively to the earthly; it shall be concerned with 'many things.' The feeblest worker shall now have much, gloriously much, to do for his beloved Lord. The seemingly mediocre life shall be expanded magnificently in its conditions and employments for the King. And even an Apostle shall be so employed that his mighty labours and their fruits below shall look narrow and scanty by comparison.

We are lost, of course, when we try to go into details. In the companion parable, that of the Pounds, we have an allusion to 'cities' as the future field of service. We ask ourselves what, in eternity, will correspond to that word, and all we can say is that 'it doth not yet appear.' 1 John iii. 2 All is yet hidden from us which can answer the question, how precisely shall we find scope for enterprise, action, government, in the life to come; what shall we achieve there; what is at all akin to the well-understood service here in which the Christian seeks to watch, and toil, and win conquests for his Lord, carrying light where there is darkness, purity where there is pollution, love where there is enmity, joy where there is sorrow, knowledge where ignorance yet reigns. We do not know, but we can abundantly believe; and in a measure we may illustrate the unknown by one glorious fact which we know already, namely, the fact of the ministry of angels. Those blessed

Matt. xviii. 10 Luke i. 19

'elder brethren' of ours, from one point of view, 'do always behold the face of our Father,' and always 'stand in His presence.' Yet they are always also 'being sent forth to minister,' in countless ways, amidst the conditions of this world of sin and sorrow. Somehow, their heavenly bliss and their earthly ministries find a perpetual and beautiful harmony in their holy experience.

So for us also, in our Master's mercy, it shall be possible to experience simultaneously the many-sided life to come. Scripture depicts it now as a rest, now as a feast, now as a song, now as a garden, now as a home. It also depicts it, as we have just remembered, as a scene of loyal and veritable work for God. And these all are sides of one life; they will be harmonized for ever by the unveiled presence of the Lord.

VIII

The Tempted Christ and His Secret of Victory

'Then the devil leaveth Him.'—Matt. iv. 11.

THE record of our Lord's Temptation in the Wilderness is one of the great mysteries of Scripture. It is a large demand on faith to take it as it stands. What do the Evangelists ask us to believe? That our Lord's sinless and perfect humanity was yet capable of temptation, real and terrible; that He was, as a fact, assailed by such temptation; that He was approached by a personal lord and chief of evil, an existence and will as real as His own; that one of the assaults of this great power upon Him was conveyed through a claim on the tempter's part to have a certain authority over the kingdoms of the world. And that claim, whatever falsehoods may have surrounded it, is surely recorded by the Evangelists in a way which suggests a mysterious element of fact within it.

All this is difficult of belief. But that only means that we want exceptional ground here for our reliance. And surely here we have it. For how

did St. Matthew and St. Luke get the narrative at all? One Person, and one only, could be the original informant. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself must have said that it happened thus and thus.

Taking then this great mystery as a great fact, let us ask over it one or two solemn questions, for our own warning and our own comfort.

First, however, let us ask what were *the forms* in which temptation assailed the Lord. In every case, evil was presented to Him deep hidden under good. He was invited to satisfy the pangs of famine by a direct act of miraculous power; to assume the empire of the world, doubtless to the world's own vast benefit; to entrust Himself in the air to the arms of angels. What a parable for us is here! To many a nature the most dangerous temptation is that which comes through avenues made of things that are good. The love of beauty, the delights of bodily or mental strength and skill, the sweetness of home, may all be made vehicles of evil if they are so treated by the will as to take, in the affections, the place of God and Christ. The process may be very subtle, the end of the wedge may be exquisitely thin; but if it actually is inserted so as to divide our will from God's will, the victory of the tempter has begun. Let us watch and pray, particularly that we may have a conscience,

not morbid indeed, but really awake. Above all let us cultivate communion with God; a hundred 'cases of conscience' will solve themselves if we live near Him.

Next, let us look at our blessed Lord's *secret of victory*. It seems to divide itself into three elements or aspects. First, we observe that He met the evil spirit in the power of the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Fresh from His baptism He went to the wilderness. The eternal Dove was upon Him when, in that dread solitude, He met the serpent. Let that be a message direct to us. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.' We will not dare to meet Satan in our own name. We will seek nothing short of that wonderful Fulness which means, in brief, the Holy Ghost in full possession of our will. And that precious gift is an open secret for all believers who will ask it. It is set forth not only in promise, but also in precept: '*Be ye* filled with the Spirit.' Let us not rest without that filling.

Zech. iv. 6

Eph. v. 18

Next, we solemnly note the Lord's use of the written Word of God. Three times the awful enemy was upon Him. Three times He beat him off by the incantation, 'It is written.' Is our faith in the Scriptures getting slack and faint amidst the chatter of many criticisms? Let us go apart sometimes, to remember that the

Bible, in the hands of the Man Christ Jesus, proved valid as a weapon in the world of spirits. Mysterious Book! If it availed there then, let us be sure it avails there now. Let us learn to know that sword; let us learn to use it.

Lastly, let us remember the Lord's great Fast in the wilderness. What is its message to us? We may or may not feel led by it to dedicate special times to special abstinence from food. But most surely it says to every Christian, Live a life always abstinent from self-indulgence, from weakening habits; live a perpetual Lent of holy self-control in the name of Jesus, and for His sake; be found, like Standfast in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, keeping wakeful upon the Enchanted
1 Pet. i. 13 Ground. 'Gird up the loins of your mind,' and of your will, and of your life; not that you may after all win the battle by yourselves, but that you may consciously, and always, keep hold upon
Psal. lx. 12 your victorious Saviour, so that He may 'tread down your enemy.'

IX

Cause Me to hear it

'Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it.'—Canticles viii. 13.

THE Song of Songs has been in all ages of the Church a peculiar treasure to hearts which have had experience of divine communion. Of recent years, literary criticism has sometimes seemed as if it would rob them of this treasure. Critical students have largely tended to deny all inner and mystical meaning in the Song, and to represent it as no more than a beautiful idyll of human love. It seems obvious to ask how, if so, the Song ever found its place in the sanctuary of the holy Books, so jealously reverenced by Israel. For it is amply clear from the Bible itself that Israel possessed a considerable literature beyond that enshrined in the Scriptures; a book needed to be more than a book, even more than a book by a famous author, to find admission there; it needed to have a sacred prestige about it. But now, apart from this consideration, literary criticism itself is helping to give us back this book

as a spiritual treasure. Some recent students have been pointing out how oriental poetry outside the Bible, the Persian poetry, for instance, is full of hidden and mystical meanings conveyed under the images of human love and human festival. Why not then the Song of Songs?

I allude to this matter before approaching our text, as just possibly some of my readers, in these days of many questions, may have been deterred a little from the spiritual use of the Canticles. Let us not fear to approach the beautiful region again. It is no dream of visionaries that in it is shadowed out 'the spiritual marriage and unity that is betwixt Christ and His Church,' aye, and betwixt the Lord and the soul which knows and loves Him. All through Scripture, in Prophets as well as in Apostles, runs the thought of that wonderful unity. It only shines out with a more special beauty and detail here.

So we listen as the divine Bridegroom (it is the Bridegroom who speaks in this verse) calls to His Bride, and asks to hear her voice. Let us attend to what He says.

'Thou that dwellest in the gardens.' So she is addressed. He has introduced her into His paradise of peace, beauty and delight; no mere visitor, soon to be conducted to the gate, but the dweller there, moving in and out habitually in the fair place which He has prepared. It is a

fit and delightful image of the Lord's intention that His Church, that His servants, even here and now, shall abide satisfied and glad. '*Christus ist mein Paradies*,' says the German hymn-writer, Novalis; 'Christ is my Paradise'; rightly intimating that we are not meant to wait till the other side of death for *all* our realization of joy and singing, rest and leisure of soul, amidst 'the beauty of the Lord our God.' In this Paradise, here on earth, walked Paul, Peter, and John, with their disciples: 'We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' 'With joy unspeakable and full of glory,' 'Having fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.'

Rom. v. 11; 1 Pet. i. 8; 1 John i. 3

But now it appears that even in this Paradise the Bride may still need to be reminded and invited to a fuller intercourse. 'The companions hearken to thy voice.' In that fair place there is company, loving and congenial. And she is assuredly not blamed for intercourse with them, with 'the companions' who share the same blessings, and see the same landscape, and understand the dialect of 'the gardens.' No, we trace no reproof in the sacred Voice among the trees and flowers. Yet we hear in it a desire, an appeal, a royal request, for more intercourse direct with HIMSELF. 'The companions hearken to thy voice' (or, perhaps, as in the margin of the Revision, 'hearken *for* it'; but the import will be much the

same); '*cause Me to hear it.*' She has been expressing and exchanging thought freely elsewhere. Will she not do the same with HIM?

The lesson for our Christian life is manifest. And it is one which is conveyed, in one form or another, by a multitude of other Scriptures, nay, by the whole drift and burthen of the Bible, which is the Lord's Word to His people inviting their responsive word to Him. Shall we lay it to heart, in holy attention, prayer and love?

'The companions hearken to thy voice'; yes, and it is well that they should do so. Sometimes in the public worship of the believing company, sometimes in more private hours, when we talk
Eph. v. 19 over the Word, or when we 'speak to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,' sometimes a pair of friends together, conferring or discussing—we 'hearken to the voice of the Bride,' through one another. And all this is well. But even this must not be a substitute for that intercourse with the 'Lover of the soul' which is for Him alone, with Him direct, and which here, as it beautifully appears, He condescends to covet and to enjoy.

In our busy and sometimes bustling modern Christian life, this is the very word to listen to, to take apart with us and act upon. Have our prayers been hindered at all by our work? Have we been leading a life so gregarious, so public

(even on its most Christian sides), that we are a little strange with ourselves? Are we insensibly getting, even in His work, a little strange with the Lord? Then let us not delay. Let us go aside in 'the gardens,' with His Book, His Promises, His own blessed Spirit ready to 'cry' in our hearts. And let us 'cause' our eternal Friend 'to hear,' nothing between, that poor voice, for which, in His wonderful grace, He listens.

X

The Un-Upbraiding Giver

'God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.'—James i. 5.

ST. JAMES says this in the course of an appeal to us to make much of the privilege of prayer. The man who 'lacks wisdom,' specially (such is the evident reference) the holy wisdom which sees and acts aright in things spiritual, let him go direct to the Giver, and ask. He will have One to deal with who is the ideal Person for a needy applicant's approach. For in the first place He giveth liberally. And then, He upbraideth not.

We are familiar with the words, and perhaps we let them pass over the heart (like too much of Scripture in general) leaving only a vague impression. We will attempt, in this brief and simple study, to do something better with them to-day. We will, with all reverence, but in a practical spirit, seeking results, take them and turn them over in our hands. The words mean what they say. And what a saying it is!

First then, 'He giveth liberally.' This, accord-

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ing to the Apostle, who knew his Lord's mind, this is the character, the way, the habit, of the heavenly Giver. He is great, and rich, and mighty. He has large gifts to give, if He will. But will He? Is it His liking to bestow? Perhaps we shall have to expend much power in asking, and then the infinite Will may consent to a very small movement in response, graduated to the minute scale of our character and position. It might be so, but it is not. 'He giveth liberally.'

Let us take that fact with us, in a conscious grasp, to the very foot of the throne of grace. We remember there, with reverent wonder, all the provision made in Christ for our access and acceptance. We adore the grace which has sprinkled the way in with the blood of Calvary, and has established the High Priest over the house of God. But having remembered this, let us clasp anew this perfectly simple assurance, 'He giveth liberally.' Not only is our access and welcome secured to some sort of mercy, to some possibilities of blessing. We are ushered in by our Mediator to the presence of Him who, to sinners coming so, is delighted to give, and to give with both hands. 'He giveth liberally.'

> "Thou art coming to a King:
> Large petitions with thee bring;
> For His grace and power are such
> None can ever ask too much."

Yes, and His habit, His blessed character, of which the grace and the power are but expressions, is such that the act of giving is His joy. 'He giveth liberally.' In His inmost eternal nature, which is Love, He is naturally communicative of good and bliss.

The sacred provision of atoning blood, of propitiation, of mediation, of advocacy, what is its purpose? Not to persuade a secluded and unwilling Power, under special circumstances, to yield something. No, but to set free along a channel
2 Cor. i. 3 of holiness the glorious 'liberality' of 'the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,' flowing down upon His dear children in His dear Son.

So let us come freely, boldly, simply, out-
Mark x. spokenly, without reserve, without shame. 'What
51 wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' The voice is not that of the unjust judge, but of the liberal Giver.

And now secondly, 'He upbraideth not.' This is a sort of development of the first statement; it is in a sense included in it. Yet it has a perfectly special import and value of its own. It tells us some things about the character and (may I dare again to say?) the habit of our blessed God which are inestimable, when we take them as they are revealed.

We all know, in human intercourse, that it is possible for a gift to be given, or a service done,

which may be in itself large, beautiful, momentous, while yet the glory and the joy is sadly taken off from it in the sequel by some sort of 'upbraiding' on the giver's part. He has given, he has served. But he somehow makes us feel that he is keenly conscious of the claims set up by the action, and that he is not at all satisfied with the way in which we have met or used it; and so it becomes to us far more of a debt than a possession. The donor is to us rather a creditor and a critic than anything else.

Now I need not say at any length that the gifts of our blessed God do, in deepest reality, set up incalculable claims upon us; may that fact sink ever deeper into our wills. Yet those claims are so presented to us in His Word as not for a moment to obscure the brightness of this utterance, 'He upbraideth not.' For the payment He asks is the payment of love. And that request can only be made by a Love which itself delights to go out freely to its object. His gifts might, if He pleased, be set before us in the aspect of so much gratuity calling for so much obedience. As a fact, they are set before us as the expression of His own yearning loving-kindness, which asks us, not for a 'tale of bricks,' but, as for heart answering heart, to give Him our love and all it contains in reply.

The Roman historian, Tacitus, noted long ago

that it is a characteristic of the basest and meanest natures 'to hate the man whom they have hurt.' It is the blessed Characteristic of the Supreme Nature, our God and Father in Christ Jesus, to love the being whom He has blest. Poor the use, at best, that we have made of His precious gifts. But He has given them to us sinners. And He loves His beneficiaries, as such, with a persistent love. 'He upbraideth not.'

XI

The Indweller's Home and Haunt

'I will dwell in them, and walk in them.'—2 Cor. vi. 16.

ST. PAUL is quoting here; he introduces the words with, 'As God hath said.' For him indeed, as for his Lord before him, the spiritual messages of the Old Testament are the very Word of God, through whatever human messenger they might come. As a fact, he is using here more than one such message, and blending them all into one. He takes one clause from Exodus, and another from Leviticus, and, in the immediate sequel goes on to Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Zechariah. But all alike is one thing as to its ultimate origin. It is, 'as God hath said.'

Exod. xxix. 45; Lev. xxvi. 12; Jer. xxxi. 30; Ezek. xi. 20, &c.; Zech. viii. 8

We notice one further point about the words. They are quoted from passages whose first reference is to 'Israel according to the flesh'; they bear upon the national community of the race of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But St. Paul is writing to the Greeks of Corinth, who had recently come out of a debasing paganism to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet he has no misgiving about his application. His converts, simply and solely

because 'they were Christ's,' because, that is, they belonged in living faith to the great Messiah
Gal. iii. 29; vi. 16 of the promises, were now, 'the Israel of God.' So to them belonged, not by a mere uncovenanted concession, but 'according to promise,' the deepest blessings lodged first in covenant for the elder Israel. Even so the Lord Jesus Himself.
Jer. xxxi. 31 Jeremiah has much to say of a 'new covenant, with the house of Israel and the house of Judah'; and it proves, when we read his words about it, to be just the glorious Gospel of pardon and of holiness. Jesus our Lord institutes His precious Supper, for all His disciples of every race for ever.
Luke xxii. 20 And He calls the cup, 'The New Covenant in My blood.' So it is for us all, be we Jew or Greek, Scythian, barbarian, bond or free.

Ancient, national Israel has still a place most special in the heart of God, and in His purposes. We cannot read Rom. xi. and doubt that. But not even that fact must obscure to us Gentile believers the glory of our own covenanted part and lot 'with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.' We are 'heirs according to promise,' lawful heirs, of the great blessings of the Word.

But this is by the way. It is a clearance of our thoughts in order to the simpler exercise of our faith and obedience. Come let us read our treasure over again. 'I will dwell in them, and

walk in them.' Such is the promise of the God of grace to the community of His faithful ones. Such surely is the promise also to the faithful member of that community, to the Christian who watches, prays, believes, obeys. Few are those promises to the Church which have not also their assured reference to the individual disciple's soul.

'I will dwell in them.' It is a wonderful word, when we take it aside and look at it anew in the light. Here is 'the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity.' He is the sovereign Cause and Basis of existence. The universe is large. But relatively to HIM, in order and mode of being, it is 'a very little thing.' The persons alluded to in the promise are inhabitants of a sand-grain on the sea-shore of His vast creation. Moreover, they are beings who have misused a mysterious moral and personal relation to Him so as to turn away from Him, and sin. Nevertheless, they are so much to the eternal Heart (for the First Cause is also the eternal Heart) that, coming to bless them, He cannot say less than this, 'I will dwell in them.' Would it not be enough that He should pass them by on the roadside of the universe, and command His angels to spare and to tend them, while He is absent in greater scenes? Nay He selects them for His personal abode. He is to be in residence and keep His court in them. 'I will dwell in them.'

Isai. lvii. 15

Isai. xl. 15.

Does my reader need to be reminded how full the whole Scripture is of that surprising promise? Let him read again Isaiah lvii., and John xiv., and Ephesians iii., and Revelation iii. and xxi., and then explore the parallels they suggest. Let him follow up the study with an act of definite faith and appropriation; receiving afresh, and for deeper effects, the indwelling of his God.

But now the promise proceeds, and borrows from Leviticus this beautiful addition, 'I will walk in them.' What has this to say to the disciple's heart, in a special message of its own?

It indicates on the one hand, under striking imagery, the delight and repose of the gracious Indweller, His being indeed *at home* in His abode. On the other hand it has a precious intimation for the disciple as to what his Lord looks for in the heart-welcome given Him there.

'I will walk in them.' We seem to see the King in His mansion and its gardens. He is not merely there; He is there possessing and enjoying. At His will, at His leisure, He traverses the chambers, He surveys the points of view, He paces the alleys and the lawns. The place is His dear *haunt*, in which He 'lives *and moves*.' Oh what benedictions to that 'haunt' are conveyed by that traversing Presence!

'I will walk in them.' Yes, and therefore to Him every gate and avenue must be perpetually open.

The Indweller's Home and Haunt

What would the lord of some fair demesne say if he was constantly barred and hindered in his home-walks by doors which his own servants had carelessly left locked against him? Alas, the King eternal, who thus mysteriously delights to make room for His own abode in His creature's heart, too often, by our grievous fault, finds it so. This chamber and that, a department of the will, of the affections, of the imagination, is not quite open to Him to-day. Neglect, unprayerfulness, self-indulgence, have left it locked; sin is in that corner, using it for itself. But it belongs to the King! And He is in residence! And hark, **Rev. iii. 20** His step is at the door!

Lord, in Thy name we will keep the avenues open. Be pleased to walk in them all, and haunt the whole place with Thyself.

XII

Every Mouth stopped

'That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.'—Rom. iii. 19.

WHAT a silence! Here is a hush in which there is a great cessation of that large amount of human utterance which is expended in self-justification. The Apostle sees, in idea, a 'world' of human hearts and souls, prostrate under a sense of guilt, and having come to the very end of explanations, extenuations, recriminations.

There is silence. Every mouth is stopped.

How obstinately strong is the inward impulse to say one word more for self! In the very first scene of human sin that impulse appears. Primal man and woman, amidst the trees of the garden, are confronted by their Maker, and questioned about their manifest guilt. The facts are patent. But the mouths are not stopped.

Gen. iii. 12, 13 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat'; 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.' So it is again and again, in the picture-gallery of the Bible.

Exod. xxxii. Aaron after the sin of the golden calf, Saul after

the halting vengeance upon Amalek, the man of the one talent in the parable—these mouths are not stopped. They must extenuate, and explain, and throw the blame, in part at least, elsewhere. 1 Sam. xv.; Matt. xxv.

But there are some great contrasts to this. There are cases where the convincing Spirit's work has penetrated 'to the joints and marrow,' and then the man's mouth is stopped. So it is with David, when Nathan comes to him, and drives the long, keen point of the story of the ewe-lamb deep into his conscience. 'I have sinned against the Lord'; that is all, and then the mouth is stopped. So it is with Job. He has fought a long battle with his friends over the awful mysteries of Providence, dark then, and dark to-day, to our short and aching sight. Then the Lord answers him, and shows him His glory, till he begins to realize something of what it is for the creature to arraign the Creator. Behold, Job's mouth is stopped. 'I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' So it is with the Publican: 'God, be merciful to me the sinner'—that, and not a word more. 2 Sam. xii. 13 Job xl. 4; xlii. 5, 6 Luke xviii. 13

Not one of these men need have been at a loss for specious self-justifications, or at least for extenuating explanations. David might easily have turned upon Nathan, and said a hundred things

about a sudden temptation, an unguarded moment, and then about an infinitely difficult situation for a king in the blaze of popular observation. Job might have fallen back with obstinate and weary reiteration upon his fearful temptations to doubt, his shocking personal sufferings, contradicting apparently a host of promises, and the needless cruelty of the suspicions and accusations of his friends, making his spirit bitter beyond bearing. The Publican had a great resource for self-defence, in the way of the world, in his training and surroundings, and in the ruthless and hardening contempt of the Pharisees.

But then, every one of these men had really, not fictitiously, heard the voice of the Lord convincing him of sin. His soul had passed through
Ps. xxxii. 6 a 'time of finding.' His 'inmost rudiment' had been exposed to the consciousness of what it is to be at variance of will with the living, infinite, holy Maker of his being. 'The law,' in St. Paul's words here before us, that is to say, the very voice of the awful, blessed will of the eternal King, had spoken to him, as under the law. And the Holy Spirit of the Lawgiver made the man's spirit fully responsive, in its penitent depths. So, his mouth was stopped.

For us to-day it needs to be the same. Man's heart in the twentieth century needs, more than ever, if that is possible, to be brought under

divine conviction of sin. It is all too rare a thing in our modern world. This is so, if I see the matter aright, very much because of the countless hindrances we have gathered round us to bar the way to real self-knowledge, and to real listening to the deeper voices of eternal truth. Our inner ears are beset with the clatter and the hum of endless theories of morals and conduct. We get only too easily accustomed to such catchwords as heredity, environment, evolution, falling upward, and the like. Certainly for one cause or another, man finds himself all too rarely now in the attitude of spirit which really hears 'the Law' speak, and then really shuts the mouth before God.

But the experience is not out of date, nor will it ever be, while God endures, and deals in justice and mercy with the being which He made in His own image, and which cast himself down from Him in the fall. O dread and still reality, when the Holy One deals so with His creature, in some hour when conscience lies awake in the dark! Extenuating circumstances may have seemed to be many, before that hour. We may have been able quite easily to urge that this incident, and that person, had really a great deal to do with our regrettable failure, our prolonged indecision, our unfaithfulness to God or man. But when 'our eye seeth Him,' then, whatever

Every Mouth stopped

He may think about extenuations, *we* think nothing about them. Our 'mouth is stopped.' Our whole consciousness is concentrated upon the awful difference between the actual condition of our will—and HIM. We have not a word to say about others, and only this to say about ourselves, 'Be merciful, to me the sinner.'

XIII

The Message of the Lord's Resurrection

(1)

'If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again.'—1 Thess. iv. 14.

WE have reached the period of the year connected for ever in the Christian's thought with the Resurrection of the Lord. We may or may not be keepers of the traditional seasons observed by so large a part of the universal Church; Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, may or may not be points in our religious almanac. But the memory of the Resurrection stands outside such questions of the calendar in this respect, that we know the season at which it occurred, as marked in *the Jewish* Year. It was just after Passover that 'Christ our Passover' was raised again, in the power of an endless life. So, within limits, we know that with the sweet spring season is immortally linked that great triumph over sin and death. The time of the Lord's Birth is, and probably will remain, a question impossible to answer with certainty. The time of His Death and Resurrection we know. It is this time of opening Spring.

1 Cor. v. 7

It is needless to point out in any detail the beautiful fitness of the season to the event. It expounds itself to every heart that thinks, believes, and feels. The Lord's return from death is indeed 'the harbinger of everlasting spring;' a spring ever rising towards that 'golden summer of the endless year of years' of which Paul Gerhardt sings, yet never losing its first freshness and eternal youth. He who rose again has not *aged* in this long tract of subsequent time, nor will He *age* through the coming ages. And the fact of His rising again is, like Himself, never old; it springs up new eternally. Well then is its anniversary accompanied by vernal beauties in garden, and wood, and field, as 'the flowers appear in the earth'; and 'the time of the singing of birds is come.'

Cant. ii. 12

Spend a little time with me this Lord's Day on some quite simple thoughts over that blessed Resurrection. What are the restful certainties which should come to us to-day, as we recite the words, 'If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again'?

Very briefly then, we will recollect the weight of fact which lies behind that 'if.' St. Paul writes it in no doubtful mood, as indeed his Greek construction indicates. It is the 'if' not of conjecture but of logic, as when we say that such and such results are certain *if* two straight lines cannot

enclose a space. He brings the Thessalonians, anxious about their buried dear ones, back to a certainty of hope by appealing to this certainty of accomplished fact. *They knew* that Jesus had died and risen. Well then, granting that, '*if so*,' with equal fulness of knowledge were they to say, '*Even so* them that sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him.' 1 Thess. iv. 14

Was it a certainty to them that He had risen? Yes; and why? Because on the one hand adequate testimony attended the assertion, the testimony not only of the words of many witnesses, but of the moral miracle which those witnesses themselves were; *they were transfigured men* compared to what they had been before Jesus rose. On the other hand the Thessalonians had themselves made proof of the transforming power of Him who was presented to them as risen again; *they were themselves transfigured men*, knowing God, loving God, at peace with Him now, and looking with indescribable assurance of hope for His glory hereafter.

Was it a certainty to them, about the year 52? I dare to say that it should be an even deeper certainty to us, in this present year. True, the vast lapse of time is on one side a trial, with the delay of the promised Return of the Risen One. But there is another side. These nineteen ages have shown us, among other things, the immortality of the Gospel. They have been strewn all over with

proofs that its 'word liveth and abideth for ever,' both in the revivals and the progress of the Church, and in the new birth and new life of innumerable individual souls. Now, the Gospel was once buried —in the grave of Jesus. His death (as a thousand artless touches in the pages of the Evangelists show us) was the death also of His disciples' hopes in Him. But the Gospel lives, and grows, and conquers, to-day. Therefore it had a resurrection. And of that resurrection there is only one adequate account to be given, alike to reason and to faith; it is, the Resurrection of the Lord. The great universal Church to-day descends in unbroken historical continuity from the little group who could do nothing but 'mourn and weep' when their Master died, and who met the first assertions of His Resurrection with a derision infinitely pathetic. They rose out of that depth to be what they were, a few weeks later, to the then world, and to be what they are to us to-day, not by any force generated among themselves. One power only was equal to that immense moral and mental miracle. It was the power to which, from the first and to the last, they assigned it, the Resurrection, or rather the Risen One; the life, the love, *the words*, of Him whom they had seen die and whom they saw risen again.

Mark xvi. 10

Next Sunday, we will carry on a little further our reflections on the glory of the fact of the

Resurrection. For to-day let us close with this brief meditation upon the fact in itself. Clasping it afresh, till its power passes into all our thought, and all our life, let us step on into 'the unknown to-morrow' with a quiet assurance that all is well, for He is risen. The statement is simple; but it is a radiating point from which results of infinite hope and re-assurance spring for ever. 'The Lord is risen indeed.'

XIV

The Message of the Lord's Resurrection
(2)

'If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again.'—1 Thess. iv. 14.

'I AM not clear what you mean by spiritual experience; I am bewildered by the conflicting thoughts of our time. But I try, amidst them, to keep my mind settled on the fact of the Resurrection.' So said an able and highly-cultivated layman, long years ago, to his friend, my dear father. They were partners in many thoughts and plans for the material help and benefit of the needy around them, and my father could not rest without seeking to secure their partnership also in the living faith of the Gospel. The words I quote were spoken in a conversation thus occasioned. And the reply to those words was this, as I remember the report; 'Keep your mind settled on that fact, and you are straight on your way to spiritual experience.'

We looked a little while last week at the simplest and also, as I think, the deepest element of the evidence for the fact of the Resurrection.

To-day let us move onward from it, or rather with it, to some of the great matters of the spiritual experience of the believer, that is to say, his personal and conscious contact with the things unseen and eternal. True, the fact of the Resurrection cannot merely by itself work the deep inward miracles of spiritual experience. But He who does and will work them, 'the Holy Spirit of the Promise' can and will use the fact of the Resurrection, the fact of the Risen One, in the blessed process. Eph. i. 13

First, then, let us, with great simplicity, take the sacred fact as our vast, our all-sufficient assurance that in this universe of ours, after all, spiritual power is the conquering power. 'Sophist may urge his cunning proofs' against all beliefs and hopes that transcend the routine of materialistic theory. Or, if a mere materialism is not in question (and we note with thankfulness how much a *mere* materialism has disappeared from most of the acutest and deepest thought of our time), the reasoner may take a line which by no means leads the anxious spirit towards the light which gathers round supreme Personal Holiness and Love, working freely for our spiritual salvation, with gifts of grace now and hopes of glory beyond the veil. Now we may be quite unable to follow, still less able to meet, one subtle speculation or another. Like my father's friend, we may

often find ourselves very seriously 'bewildered by the conflicting thoughts of our time.' But, like him, let us at least 'keep our minds settled on the fact of the Resurrection.' Let us, if I may again use the better phrase, keep them settled upon the fact of the Risen One. For never be it forgotten that 'the Resurrection' means, not an isolated story of *some man's* escape from death, but the victory over death won by '*this* Man,' the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, this mysterious, glorious Personage, the more supernatural the more you study Him; impossible to be invented by a Luke, aye, or by a John; certain, by the deepest sort of self-evidence, to have been really such as they depict. Keep your mind settled upon the fact of *His* victory over the inexorable grave, the seemingly omnipotent grave. Watch Him down, and watch Him up. See Him, on His return, passing on into a life which must now indeed be endless, 'indissoluble'; identically 'this same Jesus,' in His love, in His holy sympathies, in His witness to His Father, in His witness to His Father's Word, in His promise of His own Return from heaven. Let all this sink into the mind, as it considers, as it accustoms itself to take in, the greatness of the fact. Then look back again at the thoughts which would stifle, or at least muffle, all our hopes in the folds of

Heb. vii. 16; Acts i. 11

the material, or the cosmic, or the unknowable; or which, on the other hand, would chill them to the heart with the ice of a mere literary criticism of religion. Do not these things look less formidable now, 'if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again'?

One thing assuredly results. Some immense premises must have been left out of the logic which would discredit or minimize the faith of the soul which can only say, 'I know whom I have believed.' For here as a fact is He, the Friend of sinners, the Son of Man, vindicating Himself as 'the Son of God, with power, **Rom. i. 4** according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' Whatever else is or is not true, He, in His mighty work and victory, is unalterable fact. Whatever else can or cannot take place, this has taken place—Jesus has overcome death, and is alive evermore. He stands beside us, yet on the other side of the grave, saying, 'I was dead, and am alive, **Rev. i. 18** and have the keys of death.'

A thousand subsidiary questions of the mind, and of the soul, may remain still unanswered. But 'if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again,' the great primary questions are answered in Him for ever. There is indeed an eternal life, able to swallow up death in victory. There is indeed a Redeemer, mighty to save, no mere inspiring

memory of the past, but 'He that liveth.' And such is He seen to be, in His victory, that it needs must be eternally true that He, accessible
Heb. vii. to us in His living love, 'is able to save them
25 to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.'

XV

The Message of the Lord's Resurrection
(3)

'If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again.'—1 Thess. iv. 14.

OUR last Lord's Day meditation led us to this great first inference from the fact of the Resurrection—that if we may be sure of a Risen Saviour, we may be sure, in Him, of the bright realities of eternal life. God, heaven, prayer, immortality, are not a dream which has to fade away 'when one awaketh' in the light—a light without a sun—of a hopeless philosophy. 'If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again,' this at least is certain now and for ever, that 'we have not followed cunningly devised fables.' We are not chasing a rainbow from field to field, to find nothing, where it seemed to be, but the common earth. We are not speaking to the void air when we pray. We shall not melt into a vaster void when we die. 2 Pet. i. 16

'Every sceptic fear is vain:
Jesus died—and rose again.'

To-day let us take up one or two lines of

reflection more definite and particular, and belonging more to the interior of our faith, if we may put it so; thoughts not occupied with the bulwarks of the Gospel, but with its home and shrine.

1. Consider the witness of the Resurrection of the buried Lord to the nature and to the glorious efficacy of His atoning Sacrifice. For this, we turn to 1 Cor. xv., the great passage of all passages upon the hope and character of our own promised resurrection-day. In the earlier paragraphs of the chapter, before coming to his main subject, the Apostle gives us, as in passing, some inestimable treasures of truth. He writes down a remarkable summary of evidences for the fact of the Lord's Resurrection, and then offers some profound intimations of its place among the foundation-stones of our salvation. In this latter connexion he writes, ver 17: 'If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.'

This verse has seldom received the attention it claims, unless I am much mistaken. To the reverent enquirer after the true nature of the Atoning Work, it seems to me to be of the first importance, supposing the enquirer to accept St.
Gal. i. 12 Paul as indeed a teacher who had 'received his Gospel not of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.' What does it say? In effect it says this, that the dying work of the Lord, had it not been

crowned by His Resurrection, in other words, had it failed of its intended purpose, had it been abortive, would have left the Corinthians 'yet in their sins.' But in what sense 'in their sins'? The meaning cannot be, in this place in the argument, that they would have been still in moral bondage, still in heathen vice, unreformed, unconverted. For they *were*, actually, different beings from their old selves. As a patent fact, they *had* received an emancipation, somehow, from the slavery of evil. Whatever the reason of the matter might be, the fact of it was this; whether or no the Lord had risen, they were better men.[1] It is evident then that the Apostle refers not to the power of evil upon their wills, but to its guilt upon their heads. For him here, the phrase 'in your sins' means, involved in their tremendous consequences, snared and chained in their dread liability, lying under their doom. And the implication is that the one thing which could remove that bond and burthen was the Lord's work of death and resurrection, and that this had removed it. They were pardoned, they were accepted, justified, adopted, on account of a fact sublimely outside them in itself, though grace had put them now into living contact with it. Upon the head of Another their load had been laid — wholly and alone upon Him; with it He had sunk into the

[1] See below, p. 77, note.

depths; without it He had risen again; therefore they were no longer 'in their sins.'

So, for St. Paul, and if for him then for me, and for thee, the Lord's all-precious Work is our ONE,
Gal. iii. 13. because our all-sufficient, rest and refuge from 'the curse of the Law.' He, in His mysterious Passion, certified and crowned for ever by His Resurrection, is 'the great rock-foundation.' Christ *for* us is our peace *with* God, that Christ *in* us, by the Holy Ghost, may be our peace *of* God, in life and death.

2. Consider next the radiant message of the Resurrection of the Lord in its bearing on the reality and certainty of our own. It is in this connexion, as I hardly need remind my reader, that St. Paul writes the words which head our portion for to-day. 'If we' so 'believe,' then,
1 Thess. iv. 14 '*even so*, them also which sleep in Jesus,' 'them which were' (in the beautiful literal rendering) 'laid asleep through Jesus,' 'will God bring with Him,' with Jesus when He comes.

This is the precise point; 'even so.' As the Lord's Resurrection was not merely a revival of His influence, not merely the recovered permanence of His spiritual presence, but the actual renewal of His life embodied—'even so.' We could conceive of His Resurrection as being designed after all only to assure us in a supremely evidential way of His own everlasting and

victorious life. It does this. But with regard both to Him and to us it does more. It is a divine sanctification of the function and place of the body in the life of immortality. The Apostle is guided to press its witness upon us in this direction above all, when thus writing to the bereaved Thessalonians. Have you, for certain, a Risen Saviour—not only an immortal Saviour, but a Risen one? Then your own prospect, as you are His members, is not only immortality; it is resurrection. Mysteries unfathomable may surround the fact, but they leave the fact untouched in the midst. Not in figure, not in parable, but in deed, the believer's body as well as spirit shall inherit the bliss of heaven. 'Wherefore comfort one another with these words.' 1 Thess. iv. 18

NOTE.—It has been objected, by a friend, to the remarks on p. 75 (line 3, etc.) that they seem to ignore the absolute necessity of the finished work of Christ not only for our acceptance but for our sanctification. All that I mean is to say that *in the argument* St. Paul appears to put only the question of our acceptance into view. Had he been thinking of our sanctification, would he not have said, 'Ye *would be* yet in your sins'?

XVI

The Three Great Resurrection Interviews

'Being seen of them . . . and speaking.'—Acts i. 3.

THESE words, quoted as a fragment, are part of St. Luke's remarkable introduction to the Acts, where he expands his earlier and compressed account of the Lord's intercourse with His disciples after Resurrection. To that paragraph we owe some most precious details of that sacred time, particularly, that it lasted nearly six weeks altogether.

But I am not about to dwell upon the passage now, for it deals more with Ascension than with Resurrection. I only take this brief extract from it to be a guiding title to a few thoughts on the 'sights' and 'speakings' of the Resurrection day itself. With these which we may close this short series of meditations on the Risen One and His Glory.

We have then three recorded manifestations of the Lord Jesus, leading and outstanding, vouchsafed by Him on the day of His Resurrection. They were certainly not the only ones which that day witnessed, but they are the only ones given to

us in detail; and the details are such that each has a significance all its own, while all combine in some messages of supreme import. To Mary in the garden of the sepulchre, to the two friends on the Emmaus road, to the gathered company at evening in the chamber — these are the three manifestations in our view to-day. We owe the narratives to St. Luke and to St. John.

The Manifestation to Mary needs no re-telling. Who has not followed every step, the steps that walked and the steps that ran, till at last all was quiet in the garden, and the weeping woman, turning from the sympathy of angels, addressed herself to the imagined gardener, and found that it was her Lord? There for ever shines the scene before us, radiating the immortal light of both the majesty and the tenderness of Jesus. Never was His bearing and His speech more kingly than when He sent Mary back to 'His brethren' with the message of His coming exaltation, 'unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God.' Never was His shepherd-heart more tender in its individual sympathies than when He found out Mary's heart through her name, and devoted to her, altogether to her, that first intercourse of His immortal life, as if she were the one charge upon His hands. John xx. 11-18

Let the Christian, seeking a fresh realization of the Lord in His holy intercourse with the in-

dividual soul, often walk in thought to Joseph's garden, and listen to that colloquy by the empty cavern, while the morning sun smiles upon Mary at the Master's feet. What He was then, He is now. He knows the individual name which belongs to the individual heart. He can reveal to the solitary disciple, now as then, His glory and His grace. He can send us also away, sure at least of this, that we have seen the Lord, and He has spoken to us, all alone.

Luke xxiv. 13-32

Then came the afternoon, and the Emmaus-walk. Cleopas and his friend travel out to the country, and talk as they go; an uncommon thing with Orientals, who do not usually chat upon the road; only urgent matters break their silence then. Lo, 'a Stranger joins them, courteous as a friend.' Within a few minutes He is deep in their confidence; soon He has led them into a long, continuous, detailed Bible-study. They follow His guidance from Genesis to the latest pages of their ancient Scriptures. Strangely moving the exposition proves; their hearts are burning; their whole being is awakening to the mysterious, blessed glory of a foretold Sufferer who was to save and to reign through death. Then the sun sinks, and the three friends sit down to the evening meal, and eyes are opened, and lo, it is the Lord. Wonderful story, self-evidencing in its matchless simplicity! As an

invention, I dare to say it with decision, it is beyond the skill of human genius. As a record of fact alone is it intelligible.

Walk often to Emmaus, Christian friend, or rather, Christian friends. For here is the Lord giving His blessed company *to companions*. 'They spake to one another,' those two, and they spake about Him. 'And the Lord hearkened, and heard it,' and struck in to bless them. Friends in Christ, do you talk of Him? Do you, perhaps anxiously, converse together about His Person, His Work, His Salvation, His Book, difficulties of belief, mysteries and doubts? Be sure to carry on your talk upon the road to Emmaus. You know that you may expect JESUS near you there. Welcome HIS company. Remember what He said there long ago, about the Bible, and about Himself, and about His Cross, and His Glory. We may be very sure that His opinion on all these things, the Bible included, is now what it was then. Look out for Him, listen for Him, as you think and talk together.

Mal. iii. 16

Then later, on that Resurrection day, the night falls, and the Paschal moon is full and glorious in the sky. The disciples are gathering now in the Chamber, and shutting themselves in. Yes, they are gathering now, not walking away from one another, this way and that; for it is

John xx. 19-23

rumoured that He is risen; and a Risen Saviour is evermore a mighty magnet of union to His disciples. They gather, and gather. Apostles are there, and holy women doubtless; and now Cleopas and his friend knock and come in with their story; and voices rise in joyful mutual witness, 'The Lord is risen.' Then, behold, the Risen One Himself! Jesus is in the midst, speaking peace, showing His hands and His side, breathing on them the Spirit, sending them to the world. And oh how glad are the disciples, for they see the Lord.

Here is a scene meant indeed to live in the hearts of Christians as they meet in their congregations. 'There am I in the midst of them.' This evening meeting, the Risen Lord with His disciples, is like a visible seal upon that promise, a heaven-given help to realize and appropriate its blessing. Not in the mode and manner of that blessed evening, yet with an equal reality, 'where'er His people meet,' there, in a wonderful speciality, the eternal Master is. He is there to breathe His peace, and to breathe His Spirit, to manifest His glories to the soul, and to animate His servants, as they have met in His name, so also in it to part, to be witnesses and ministers of His salvation to the world.

Matt. xviii. 20

XVII

The Heavenly Mind

'Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'—Col. iii. 1.

THE ascension of our dear risen Lord into heaven is an event which ranks among the earliest and the greatest certainties of our faith. It is expressly recorded in two Gospels, St. Mark and St. Luke, and in the Acts. St. John makes the Lord Jesus twice over refer to it in prospect; 'What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?'; 'I ascend unto My Father and your Father.' In the Acts and the Epistles it is everywhere taken for granted that JESUS, though out of sight, had left His people (only for a while) by a definite step upward to the heavenly throne; 'received up in glory.' His had been no vague vanishing away, no mysterious disappearance they know not how. At such a time, from such a spot, He had quitted the ground, He had mounted in the air, He had climbed the visible sky, in glorious symbol of His return to the supreme state of majesty in the invisible.

John vi. 62; xx. 17

1 Tim. iii. 16

No wonder that in the very earliest beginnings

of anything like an 'Apostles' Creed,' in the second century, we find the Ascension among the primary facts of faith. 'The Church, though dispersed through all lands,' writes Irenæus, in that early age, 'holds, as the teaching of the Apostles, the bodily Ascension into the heavens of the beloved Jesus Christ, our Lord.'

The Ascension is, from one point of view, a supreme miracle, an act and fact of the supernatural order in the highest degree; and, as such, it gathers a thousand unanswerable questions around it. From another point of view, it is a help to the simplest thought and faith. Did that blessed Lord, that 'beloved Jesus Christ,' ascend 'bodily' into the heavens? Then there is given to me a point of rest and light in my thoughts about that invisible world. About it I know almost nothing else in detail. 'It doth not yet appear.' But I know this; it is where He, 'bodily,' is gone. The latitude and the longitude of my eternal hope and home are given me in this: it lies 'where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'

Shall I puzzle myself, till reason almost swims, with the mysteries of time, and space, and place? Shall I ask unanswerable questions about what the
Heb. i. 3 throne is, and what is 'the right hand of the majesty on high'? No; I will rather cultivate, cherish, and develope this blissful certainty, which will one day throw its light over a million mysteries;

the region of my coming happy life is 'where Christ, the ascended Christ, sitteth, at the right hand of God.'

Very practical is the use made by St. Paul of this fact about heaven, this localization of the state of glory. He is writing to believers. He tells them that as such, as men and women, whose faith, sealed by their baptism, has joined them to the Lord, they are 'risen with Christ.' Col. iii. 1
One with Him, in His Death they died, receiving all the precious benefits of Calvary as truly as if the members had been crucified themselves, instead of the Head having suffered for them. One with Him, in His Resurrection they had risen, sharers of His 'endless life,' living with a vitality which rose above all death, a life 'hidden with Christ in Col. iii. 3
God'—He in them, they in Him, in the wonderful bond bound by the Holy Ghost. Well, let them now remember that their dear risen Lord and Life was 'seated on the right hand of God.' And let their oneness with Him take this further range; let them yield their being to the magnet of the fact that their Head had thus gloriously 'out-soar'd the shadow of our night.' His blessed Presence, bodily, was nowhere lower than *there*, 'on the right hand of God.' Then let the drift of their thought and love take that direction too. Let them cultivate 'the heavenly mind.'

Two phrases are used by the Apostle in this

connexion. The first is, as we have seen, '*seek* those things which are above.' In other words, set the helm of the life that way; make for that blessed shore, by the heavenward use of thought, love, and will. 'Seeking' may mean either of two very different processes, according to context. It may mean a weary quest of a lost thing, or of a thing uncertain, as when year after year brave men 'sought' in vain the relics of Sir John Franklin's company in the awful North, or earlier, when Raleigh sought in vain the fabled golden city of Manoa in the West. But 'seeking' may also mean the following of a sure clue to a certain though as yet invisible bourne, as when Columbus 'sought,' on solid grounds of reason, a shore beyond what seemed the boundless Ocean. Such is our 'seeking.' We have the latitude and the longitude. We do not yet see the shore. But it is there, there; 'where Christ sitteth.'

The other phrase of the Apostle is, '*set your affection* on the things above.' That is to say, looking at the Greek, 'let your bias go that way.' 'Affection' is here used by our translators in the large old sense, including much more than mere fondness. It imports tone of mind, drift of interests, cast of disposition. Well, this is to be *our* 'bias.'

Luke xii. 34 We are to ponder our Treasure, and His place of rest and power, till the whole set and drift of our 'heart' is there also. We are to dwell upon and

develope our information (in Christ) about heaven, till it colours our purpose and our conduct all through. And this *can* be done, as surely as we *can* 'abide in Him, and He in us.' For heaven is, for us, 'where Christ sitteth.' John xv. 4

Let Christians deliberately covet and acquire 'the heavenly mind.' It is perhaps not now so common a spiritual characteristic as once it was, so importunate around us is this present scene. But the heavenly mind, in Christ, is as possible now as ever, and as practical. And it is wholly for practical ends that St. Paul here dwells upon it. For he goes on direct from it, and with it, in the paragraph that follows, to the subject of the Christian's triumph over very real sins, in very real life, in the power of the heavenly mind.

XVIII

The Ten Days before Pentecost

'Wait for the promise of the Father.'—Acts i. 4.

TAKING the narrative of the Acts as our guide, we have reason to think that about ten days intervened between the Ascension of the Lord Jesus and the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. 'Pentecost,' as we know, is only the Greek word for 'fiftieth,' the fiftieth day from Passover. At Passover the Lord died and rose
Acts i. 3 again, and for some forty days remained with His followers below. Thus His Ascension took place about ten days before Pentecost; a broad interval. Then, on that 'fiftieth day,' the mighty shower of blessing fell upon the waiting church, the fire and the wind of God, the baptism of the Eternal Spirit.

Amidst the many wonders of the Christian Pentecost, not the least is this fact of the interval between the up-going of the Saviour and the down-coming of the Comforter. I venture to say that no mere inventor of a legendary story of redemption would have put that interval into his narrative; it carries its own truth upon its face. Well, what may we gather to be the meaning, the

message, of this marked and deliberate pause? Why did the disciples thus need to be sent away by their ascending Lord to '*wait* for the promise of the Father'? Acts i. 4

At first sight, surely, we might well ask whether they were not already fully equipped for their work. Think how vastly much they knew, and how truly and how deeply they loved. As regarded their knowledge, they were now, all of them, perfectly and for ever sure of that vast foundation fact, that 'Jesus died and rose again.' Yes, and not so only; they had been permitted for nearly six weeks to have one interview after another with the crucified and risen Lord. Added to the three wonderful years of their 'coming in and going out' with Him, before He suffered, that long season of absolutely unique opportunity and blessing, they had now enjoyed this period after His Resurrection, when of course every previous impression must have been divinely deepened, and a thousand new immortal lights shed upon their knowledge of the Lord. Then further, they had already greatly grown in their devotion to Him, and trust in Him. Dear as He was to them before, was He not dearer now? That one scene beside the lake, in John xxi., seems in a way quite new to take us into the depths of mutual love between Master and disciple. That moment where Thomas, in the upper chamber, says on a sudden, after all his 1 Thess. iv. 14 John xx. 28

doubts, 'my Lord and my God,' seems to carry us to the highest heights of adoring devotion.

Was not all this enough? Were they not adequately equipped, with such knowledge and such loyalty, for going out into the world, and calling it to come to Jesus, and to be blest in Him? What, must they wait, and wait, day after day, a week, eight days, ten, for the power which was to 'endue' them, clothe them, 'from on high?'

Luke xxiv. 49

Yes, they must, according to their Lord's wise love. And the after story of the Acts, and the words of the Epistles about the Holy Ghost, aye, and the language of the Gospels too, recording (as in John xv., xvi.) the thoughts of the Lord Himself about the Holy Spirit, all help us to grasp something of the reason. Let us reflect upon it; it is a message for our own inmost hearts.

The Apostles had much indeed, but they wanted more. They possessed treasures sacred, indispensable, vital. But in order to the fulness of their life and witness they wanted more. They had, in a supreme degree, *historical knowledge* of the Lord Jesus, in all the wonderful unfolding of His life and work on earth. They had come, especially since the Resurrection, to see deep into the boundless blessings which that life and work were to bring to believing man. And they had

personal devotion to Him, strong and true, glowing in their hearts, the stronger and the truer because of the discoveries which they had all made of their own sin and weakness. But they needed still, speaking broadly, and allowing for many gracious beginnings and foretastes before Pentecost, the deep working of the eternal Spirit, to put the Lord Christ and them into full, supernatural spiritual contact; 'He in them, and they in Him.' I dare to say that, till Pentecost, the entire meaning of the words, 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,' would not have been recognized by them as within their experience. But *then*, those words would exactly express what they knew, what they had, what they could use, in a strength not their own.

John xvii. 23

Eph. iii. 16

Their knowledge of the blessed facts, their devotion to the blessed Person, had to be touched from above by a power which made it work in them, under the very hand of God. The SPIRIT needed to 'take of the things of Christ, and shew them unto them'; to 'strengthen them in the inner man, that Christ might dwell in their hearts, by faith.' Then, and not till then, were they fully ready to move the world for Him.

John xvi. 14

'As then, so now.' Nothing is more profoundly needed now in the Church, and in the soul, than a new development of the power of Pentecost. Let the blessed COMFORTER be welcomed in His

benignant power, humbling us, exalting Christ, bringing Him anew to dwell in our hearts by faith. Let Him in His grace and love respond to the 'truthful call' of the disciples of to-day. And lo, a thousand obstacles will melt around us, and we, whatever obstacles remain, shall be ready, amidst them, for a witness and a work full of joy, full of force, full of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, come, gracious Spirit, come quickly, and in power.

XIX

The Spirit and the Christ

'He shall glorify Me.'—John xvi. 14.

LAST Sunday we thought a little on that impressive object-lesson, the ten days' gap between the great Ascension and the great Descent. Its message to us is surely this, that the full presence and power of the blessed Spirit of God is not only important, but supremely important, nay, vital, in the work and witness of the Christian and of the Church.

Now let us approach the holy subject a little nearer. Rather less generally, though it is but in outline after all, let us think of the promised work of the Holy Ghost in one supreme aspect of it. That aspect is the connexion of the work of the Spirit with the glory of Christ.

Nothing is more noteworthy than this connexion. It appears everywhere in the Bible. The great prophecies of Messiah in Isaiah are full of it. 'The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him'; Isa. i.-xi. 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me.' It comes up at once in the Gospel history. The Spirit is the divine Worker in the Birth of the 2; lxi. 1 Luke i. 35

Luke iii. 22; iv. 1 Lord Jesus. He descends upon Him at His Baptism. He leads Him into the wilderness. He leads Him to His work in Galilee. The Son,

Heb. ix. 14 'by the eternal Spirit, offers Himself without spot

Acts i. 2 to God.' 'By the Holy Spirit' He 'gives commandment to the Apostles.' In the Master's own

John xvi. 8-11 words when the Spirit comes, His 'conviction of the world about sin, and righteousness, and judgment,' is all to be connected with Christ; 'because they believe not in me'; 'because I go to

John vii. 38, 39 the Father.' The Spirit is to be given only 'when Jesus is glorified.' Out of Jesus as the fountain are to flow the 'rivers of living water' 'which they that believe on Him should receive.' And when the great blessing comes at last in its fulness, the result is just this, that the Spirit-filled Church pours out a glorious testimony to the fulness of her Lord. So it is even to the closing Book of the Bible, where we have, in one of the seven Epistles

Rev. ii., iii. after another, the two Voices blent into one in their infinite connexion. Each begins with 'thus saith' JESUS CHRIST, under one glorious title or another. Each ends with 'hear what the SPIRIT saith unto the Churches.'

Let this be well remembered. There is no separate 'Gospel of the Holy Ghost.' The plan of God assuredly is not to teach us about Christ, as a first lesson, and then, as a more advanced lesson, to lead us on into truth about

the Holy Ghost, apart from Christ. We do indeed, and to the last, need teaching about the blessed Spirit. But the more we learn about Him the more surely we shall learn this from Him, that His chosen and beloved work is just this—to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us lay our poor hearts more and more simply in His way for that work, that He may do it in us. Let us carry with us the recollection we spoke of last Sunday. Was it necessary that He should come to the Apostles, even after they had eaten and drunk with the risen Saviour, and by His inward power make Christ Jesus a divine Reality in their hearts, present and powerful? Assuredly He is at least as necessary so to us. Let us not fail to plead the promise of the Father, in the name of the Son. Let us remember that we may have a complete historical knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and even a deep loyalty to His Person, and yet fail to be in divine union, spirit to Spirit, with Him. We may 'know Him after the flesh,' but not after the SPIRIT. Come then, Thou Holy One. *Veni Creator Spiritus.* Take this heart in hand, and glorify Christ to me. Show Him to me as being consciously 'all my salvation and all my desire.' Grant me to know, consciously, that He and I are 'joined, one Spirit.' Make me able, in all my soul's weakness, to welcome Him every day into my heart, by faith,

2 Cor. v. 16

2 Sam. xxiii. 5

1 Cor. vi. 17

to dwell and to rule. Teach me every day to
1 Cor. xii. 'call Him Lord,' for Thou only canst do it; to
3 'call Him Lord' with a divinely given sense of His greatness, His love, His mastership, and His full salvation. Make Thou the blessed twofold
1 Cor. vi. motto of my life to be ever this—'in the name of
11 the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'; joining Him and Thee together in one secret of power and peace. O glorify Christ to me, that Christ may be glorified, in some humble measure, through me.

Turning for a few closing moments to our text, let us notice how intensely *personal* are its terms. Nothing is more characteristic of the Gospel than its holy way of giving all its truths a personal aspect. No, nothing in it is merely abstract; all is alive, with 'He,' and 'Him,' and 'Thou,' and 'Thee.'

'He shall glorify me.' It is a Person who is to work. Let us grasp afresh the living Personality of the Holy Ghost. He is the heavenly Wind, the heavenly Water, the heavenly Fire. But that Wind, that Water, that Fire, is not It, but He. As truly as Christ the Son is not a mere notion, or force, or principle, but our own beloved Saviour, so truly is the Spirit of eternal Love no mere power, but our own almighty Friend; *loving* the soul He teaches, loving (with the love of God for God) the Lord who is His Lesson. And then, and indeed, it

is a Person who is the Matter of the Spirit's work. O happy fact of salvation! The supreme Teacher draws nigh to teach us. And He throws His exalted light not first, or most, or last, upon an eternal principle, though eternal law does lie so deep in all He has to say. He sheds an illuminating glory upon a Heart, a Face, an Embrace; 'the beloved Jesus Christ, our Lord.'

XX

The Blessed Trinity

'The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'—Matt. xxviii. 19.

VERY simply, and briefly, and in a spirit of worship and love, let us think a little this Sabbath morning upon the Holy Trinity.

'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, Merciful and Mighty,
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.'

The word Trinity does not occur in the Bible. But it expresses, by its meaning ('Threeness,' or 'Threefoldness'), with a wonderful fulness in brevity, a mass of Bible truth about our God. It is thus a word which Christians may prize and use, although they freely own that the word is not itself divine.

What two grand truths, on the whole, does the Book set forth about the Being of that Blessed GOD whom it reveals? First, an unspeakable and supreme Oneness. Then, we affirm it without misgiving, an equally wonderful and sublime and mysterious Threeness.

All down through the many books of that

'Divine Library,' the Bible, we have the ever-repeated assertion of the eternal Oneness of the true God. 'Hear, O Israel; the LORD Thy God is One LORD,' or, let us render it, 'JEHOVAH is Thy God, JEHOVAH is One.' Before and beside Him there is no divine power. There may be, there are, other *superhuman* powers, 'gods many, lords many.' But they are immeasurably different from Him. 'There is no God beside Me; I know not any.' And all this is carried over into the New Testament, and reaffirmed as by the very voice of Christ.

Deut. vi. 4

Isai. xliv. 8

But then, this same Book has another side to its account of GOD. Even in the Old Testament this appears. A mysterious Person, 'the Angel of Jehovah,' is often mentioned. He is a sublime enigma. As 'Angel' He is, of course, for He appears as a Messenger. But He continually speaks as if Himself also Master; as for example when He says to Abraham, 'Thou hast not withheld thy son *from Me*.' Not to dwell on many a similar mystery in the Prophets, we come to the Evangelists and Apostles. And there we find references, scattered all about, to—not two, nor five, nor twenty, but—Three Persons (we can only call Them so) for whom is claimed divine, eternal, honour. Everywhere appears the FATHER, in His unchallenged glory. But then also there is the SON, the WORD, of whom it is written, 'Thy

Gen. xxii. 12

throne, O God, is for ever'; 'The Word was
Heb. i. 8 John i. 1 God'; and who, though also Man with men,
Matt. xi. 27 says, 'No one knoweth the Son but the Father'; 'I and my Father are One.' And then there is also the SPIRIT, the PARACLETE, of whom it is
1 Cor. vi. 19 written, 'Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.' And who inhabits a temple, if not its God?

How shall we harmonize these two sacred strains of truth into one? Surely, by the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Let us hold to the uttermost the Eternal Oneness of the Divine Being. Let us reverently own, because the messengers of God's own revelation bid us do so, that *within* (not outside, but *within*) that Oneness, within that bright Depth, within that most holy Sanctuary, unchangeable and eternal, there is a Life which is More-than-Oneness. Within the One Being there is no solitude, but the unspeakable Companionship of Love with Love. The One God moves and glows within with relations and responses of
John xvii. 24 infinite love. There, 'before the foundation of the world,' the FATHER loved the SON. There, eternally, the eternal Spirit of life and of love is with Them, is One with Them.

All that thought can do, at this holy height, is just to recognize what revelation says, and then to kneel down side by side, with faith and love. Thought can recognize. Thought can see that we

are called not to believe against reason, but above it, which is another thing. And then thought can come down to the plain, as it were, and follow out some of the results of its view of that Great Glory.

Of those results, take to-day just this one. We have recollected how the Godhead, revealed in Scripture, is a Godhead of glorious inward Love. It is no sublime solitude. It is infinite and eternal Fellowship. Well, how divinely fitting then that from it should flow forth a Stream true to that Fountain! 'God is Love.' That is, after all, the true message of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And lo, the whole Trinity pours Itself forth, in love, for the salvation of sinners. The Father gives the Son. The Son unites Himself to the sinner. The Spirit opens the sinner's soul to his Redeemer's glory. It is a Trinity of saving love.

1 John iv. 8, 16

The great lake of Central Africa, the deep Victoria Nyanza, is one exhaustless reservoir of waters, clear and pure, its surface flashing to the equatorial sun, and a thousand currents far beneath stirring its massy volume. At its northern border the shores open, and the lake issues, thundering, in a river; that river is the Nile. Forth goes the wonderful stream on its journey of fertility and blessing, till it pierces the Nubian hills, and floods with its benignant overflow the plains of Egypt. And, all along, it is but the great Lake,

extended into the great River; the Nyanza mirrors the Pyramids, the Nyanza gives the harvest to the Delta, and bears European commerce on its breast at Alexandria.

All similes are altogether inadequate to set forth the glory of the Trinity of Love. But just a step or two upwards they may help our thoughts. The blessed Deity is essential, everlasting, internal Love;

> 'A sea of light and love unknown,
> Without a bottom or a shore.'

And Redemption is but that Love in overflow and outflow. God in Three Persons is true to His Eternal Nature in the sinner's salvation from death and sin.

XXI

Concentric Circles

'In the world': 'in Me.'—John xvi. 33.

THESE words are part of the closing sentences of our dear Lord's last address to His disciples, on the eve of His death. He did indeed speak again, immediately afterwards, and in their presence. But that was an utterance not to them, but for them; it was what the Germans beautifully call the great High-priestly Prayer, the prayer of John xvii., in which He solemnly entrusted His disciples to His Father, closing His requests for them with that supreme expression of desire, whose very manner is divine: 'Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.' That Prayer is, may we not say? the Holy of Holies of the Bible. John xvii. 24

But our words for this Sabbath's meditation are found not in that Sanctuary, but on its threshold. They are spoken straight to weak and troubled human hearts, in their mortality, their mistakes, their fears. They tell of a life 'in the world,'

which the disciples must inevitably live, and of the strife, the pressure, the 'tribulation,' which that life must involve. Yet the precious words, while they stand just outside the sanctuary, reach their hands as it were within it, to bring out its treasures. Their promises are for earth, for time, for the Christian's needs to-day. But the reasons of the promises lie deep in eternity, in glory, in the Lord of glory, even Jesus Christ, who is our life.

'In the world': 'in Me.' Here are two contrasted conceptions—one would say at first sight, two irreconcilable conceptions. The matter treated of is the life and experience of the disciple of Jesus, his field and sphere of existence. This, in one breath, is described as 'in Me'; in the next, nay, in the same, as 'in the world.' What a measureless difference! Can these two positions, these two *locations*, belong to the same being, at the same time? At best, must not the man be supposed to fly to and fro, and take his residence up now in one, now in the other, now in the blessed Paradise, now in the desert of the world?

Not so, according to the Lord's manifest meaning. The two positions are intended, in His thought, to be simultaneous and combined; the contrasts are all to be harmonious; the opposites are to be poles of one sphere. 'In the world ye

shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace.'

A very simple simile may illustrate the truth. This is a matter of concentric circles. The central point, all along, in respect of experience, is the Christian man. Around him rolls, as the necessary outer circle of his life, the world; that is to say, the present current of human things, disordered by sin, with its countless interests, its manifold intercourse, its light and music, its strife and storms, its shocks of change and death, its dreadful drifts of temptation, its alienation from the holy will of God. Yes, around him moves this great 'world,' this *cosmos*, with its winds and its clouds. Nay, like the physical atmosphere, it not only revolves around him; it enfolds him, and enters into him. Whether he will or no, whether he likes it or no, he is in it, as man is in mid-ocean, though he may be borne along by the great 'liner,' above the depths.

But then, this same disciple is also, such is the blessed promise, 'in Me,' in Christ. A concentric circle, closer and nearer, is about him in the midst of the tumult; and it is the Lord. The same being, the same conscious, feeling, needing, personality, is the centre of both. But while the outer circle rolls round that centre with all its agitation, the inner circle is the peace of God Himself. For it is the presence, the embrace,

of Him who has overcome the world, aye, and
Phil. iii. 21 has now overcome the man, 'subduing all things unto Himself.'

To revert for a moment to the imagery of the ocean-voyage. The traveller is far from land; the Atlantic is his horizon, his scenery, rolling, heaving, perhaps wild with the tumult of the storm. But then, if he is in the midst of the sea, he is, in a far more immediate sense, in the midst of the ship. Humanly speaking, he is safe—in the inner circle. So with the world's 'cold ocean.' It is treacherous, deep, restless; it is the scene of innumerable deaths. Aye, but you are no more asked to meet it *exposed* than the traveller is asked *to swim* the Atlantic waves. The Lord offers Himself to be our mighty, our almighty, transport-vessel, which cannot lose its reckoning, and cannot founder. We take refuge in Him by faith, and lo, the troubled sea is around us still, we feel its heaving, we hear its voices. But He is around us, much nearer, and in that respect much more.
Isai. xliii. 2; Exod. xxxiii. 14 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee'; 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee'—not only after the strife, but in it—'rest.'

It was true of old. *In* Rome, *in* Corinth, the saints were yet more *in* Christ; and their lives were luminous with Him. It is true to-day. *In* China, aye, *in* murderous Shansi, *in* Africa, *in*

England, *in* toil, *in* sorrow, *in* withering pain, *in* hatred of opposition, *in* manifold temptation, the children of God do still, abiding *in* Christ, prove 'more than conquerors.' In the world, but not of it, they are therefore the truest blessing for it; embodiments and conveyers, amidst its 'tribulation,' of their Master's 'peace.'

Rom. viii. 37

XXII

The two Coal-fires

'A fire of coals.'—John xviii. 18.
'A fire of coals.'—John xxi. 9.

VERY interesting is the likeness and then the contrast of the two scenes indicated by these two identical phrases. The likeness consists in several points. There is first, of course, the incident, common to both, of the fire and its fuel. Further, there is the occurrence, beside each fire, of conversation, an interchange of questions and answers, in each case most pointed and memorable. Further, one principal speaker, the answerer, is the same on both occasions; it is Simon Peter, who is drawn on, in the presence of witnesses, each time, thrice in succession, to make assertions about his relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. Lastly, the Lord Himself is both times present, though on the first occasion it is only as an observer in the background, who, probably from the wide-open chamber where He is placed before the unjust judge, 'turns' His sacred face to the courtyard, 'and looks upon Peter,' as Peter stands

Luke xxii. 61

by the fire of coals. On the second occasion He is the central Figure of the scene.

The contrasts, on the other hand, are at least equally remarkable. The coals for the first fire were gathered and kindled by 'the servants and officers,' the domestics and the constables, who were so busy that cold passover-evening, and felt the keen air the more as the night wore on, and the proceedings in-doors before the Priests were protracted. The coals for the second fire—who laid them, and who lighted them? Was it not the work of the Lord Himself, in the mystery, in the reality, of His resurrection-body? Again, the scenes of the two kindlings were strikingly contrasted. The first was the central quadrangle of the high-priestly palace, thronged with a miscellaneous concourse of officials and lookers-on, while the bearer of Aaron's office was busy close by, hastening the doom and the death of the true Melchizedek. It was night; it was the hour of the power of the darkness of the eternal night. The second scene was the fair margin of the Galilean lake, deep in its genial valley, in the season of flowers, and under the light of the rising day; and the only company was the risen Jesus, and those seven favoured men who 'knew that it was the Lord.' From around him for ever had died away the contradiction of sinners. He sate now, quiet and serene, in the loving majesty

of His victory for us, to bless, to command, to empower His happy followers for their glorious work for Him. Lastly, on the one occasion, Peter's voice, now (as we seem to hear it) in half-stifled accents, now rising, in its despair, in loud appeals to heaven, in 'anathema and adjuration,' is heard denying all connexion with Jesus, all knowledge of Him, as one rude enquirer and another, man and woman, challenges him to confess. On the other occasion that same voice is heard again, and once more in three successive utterances. This time it is the Lord who questions.

John xxi. 17 And all that the Apostle has to say is, 'Thou knowest that I love Thee; Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

It is a moving contrast, all along. Let it speak to us, this Lord's Day, some of its manifold messages. We will look at Peter first, then at the Lord.

Consider the Apostle, first by one fireside, then by the other. Is it possible that we have the same person? This abjectly-frightened denier of his best, his glorious Friend, can he be identically the same with the man who sits by the side of that Friend and Master, calm, humble, entirely devoted, sparing of all exuberant expression, afraid now only (so it surely appears) of himself, simply affirming, in terms profound in their brevity, his love? Yes, it is the same. The being which experienced by the one fireside that terrific moral

collapse is the very being which, by the other, sits at peace by the feet of Jesus, 'clothed' with the beauty of holiness, 'and in his right mind' for life and death. Something has wrought an inconceivable revolution, which yet is actual. The ruin has been more than rebuilt. Old things are passed away, behold all things are new, and all things are of God. It is the same man. But it is a new creation. And while the ruin passes, the new creation stands. To the end, Peter is now the man not of the first fireside, but of the second. 'Thou knowest that I love Thee' is the account now of his whole life, till he stretches out his hands upon the Roman cross, and by death glorifies God.

But then—the Lord. Here is the secret of the wonderful contrast between the Peter of the first fire of coals, and the Peter of the second. It is, that Jesus is the same, yesterday, on the first occasion, and to-day, on the second. The heart of the wonderful Master is identical in both scenes. He who 'turned and looked on Peter' in his terrible fall, so that Peter did not throw himself away, but wept, is only *the same* when He approaches the man with that enquiry which opens up His own unalterable heart of love, 'Do you love Me?'

And we, dear reader, you and I, in ourselves, are just mirrored in Peter's weakness in himself. And for us, for you and me, this same Jesus is still the same, at the side of either fire of coals.

XXIII

Faith in the Open Air

'But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.'—Psal. lxxvii. 10.

THIS Psalm, like very many others, is a record of spiritual conflict and victory. It is attributed in the ancient title to Asaph, to whom the like authority assigns that wonderful Psalm, the seventy-third, one of the most significant pictures of doubt and deliverance in the whole Bible. Certainly there is this 'family-likeness' between the two Psalms, that in each of them we see first a heart eating itself away, as it were, with inward questionings, with awful misgivings about eternal things, under the perplexities of Providence, and then that same heart finding a wonderful solution and repose in going out of itself to look upon God.

In the seventy-third Psalm the troubled believer
ver. 17 gets to rest again by 'going into the sanctuary.' That is, as I should suppose, by a literal visit to the Temple, and a solemn meditation on its significance as the vast sacramental seal and sign, so to speak, of the faithfulness of the God of the covenant and the promise. In view of this,

his inner eye clears and brightens, and he is again able to look at things in their true proportions; and so the mysterious 'prosperity of the wicked' is seen to be but a partial and evanescent incident in view of the eternal certainties of the righteousness of Jehovah.

In this seventy-seventh Psalm Asaph (if we may use his name) finds himself again in darkness; 'stretching out his hand in the night, refusing to be comforted.' Nay, from one point of view, when he 'remembers God,' evidently in the awfulness of His holiness, in the dread rigour of His eternal law, his soul is 'troubled'; he 'cannot speak.' Do we know anything of this? Is it with an awestruck dread that, remembering ourselves, we remember God, feeling for the while as if we would, if we could, creep away from Him, and hide among the trees? If it be so, may Asaph's happy after-experiences be ours. And that it may be so, let us make experiment of Asaph's way. ver. 2 ver. 3, 4

What did he do? If I may put it very boldly, very simply, he left the close and fetid chamber of mere self-consideration, and walked into the open air. And what, for him, was the open air? It was God, seen in the great field of human life, in the large history of redemption. He looked, for the time, away altogether from Asaph, and 'remembered the years of the right hand of the ver. 10

Most High.' By those 'years,' evidently, he means not his own past experiences of mercy, in individual life, but the story of the people of God. He recalls, in fact, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Before him, as a Hebrew believer, there rises up that sublime historical event, to whose mighty reality every page, well nigh, of the Old Testament, from Exodus onward, bears witness to us. He sees the people in their dire perplexity, hemmed in by Pharaoh this way and by the Red Sea that way. And lo, the very waters have to yield to the *command* of
ver. 16-20 the great Deliverer; 'the waters saw Thee, the depths were troubled; Thine arrows went abroad; the voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven; Thy way was' (so surely we must read; '*was*,' not '*is*') 'in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps were' (not '*are*') 'not known.' So Thou didst take a path open only to Thine own omnipotence. So 'Thou leddest Thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.'

No result is recorded of that walk into the open air, by that Red-Sea-shore which saw the great deliverance from trouble. But how impressively the result is suggested by silence! Asaph has no more to say, for his spirit is at rest in God.

Is there not a true message here for certain states of the Christian's mind? Are we tempted

to stay too much indoors, so to speak, and muse, and brood, and mourn, and fear? Is it our own soul that occasions the trouble? Is it the state of the Church, or of the world, just in our own time? Whatever it is, is it something that shuts up our view, as it were, within four dark walls? If our own soul's state really calls for explicit confession to God, let us make it; in *that* sense let us do anything rather than get away from the facts. If in the troubles of a troubled time we can *do* anything, however little, let us do it; in *that* sense let us not look away from them. But, with that proviso, let us as promptly as possible open the door and walk out, spiritually, into the open air. Let us 'remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' Let us look out, and look up, to some great fact, objective and sublime, which witnesses to Him.

To take examples; let us go to our Bible, and get once more, quite fresh and at first hand, some grand specimen of its witness to Jesus. Read a great paragraph of the Gospels again, above all, the paragraphs of the Cross and Resurrection. 'Never in my young manhood,' wrote the late Lord Chancellor Hatherley to me, 'were my doubts so solved as by reading over again, from time to time, the closing chapters of St John.' Do not trouble yourself, for this purpose, with critical details. Look at the forest, not at the trees. Let the

impression of the Gospel portrait of the Lord Jesus come on you with its inexpressible weight of truthfulness and majesty. Let the effects of the Resurrection, seen in the transfigured disciples, and in the upspringing Church, tell with simple power upon your reason. And then ask yourself, is not there basis enough here for a calm, large, hopeful 'remembrance of the years of the right hand of the Most High'?

Then take a walk out in the broad fields of Christian history; the annals which give us an Augustine, a Bernard, a Huss, a Luther, a Ridley, a Bunyan, a Fenelon, a Wesley, a Moody. Take a walk out over the vast 'brotherhood which is in the world,' scattered under every sky, speaking every language. There they are, on the arctic ice, under the tropic palms, in the cities, the islands, the wildernesses; all one in Christ Jesus. It will be a bracing exercise to travel so. And we shall return to find the chamber of our own life the airier, and to set to work afresh within, in a new, bright, blessed consciousness of God, full of the power of the years of His right hand.

XXIV

Holy Converse in Bad Times

'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened.'—Mal. iii. 16.

THE Bible is rich in special encouragements for the dark and difficult day. Scattered all over its biographical pages are the portraits of the good men of unfavourable periods, made strong by grace to meet their trying surroundings, and not only to meet them, and endure them, but to illuminate and to bless them. The Psalms, in far the larger number of them, are, from the human side, just the 'good thoughts in bad times' of sorely tried and tempted children of God. And the writings of the Prophets and of the Apostles may often be described, from the same human side, in the same terms. Here, in the last page of the Old Testament, we have not the Prophet's own utterance of this sort, but a very beautiful allusion to many such utterances around him; an allusion full of cheer, and full of teaching, for ourselves.

Truly the days were dark around Malachi and his pious friends. We need not here laboriously enquire into his date. Whatever that date was,

it marked a period in the history of Israel when iniquity abounded and love waxed cold; a depressing, saddening time. One curious feature of the current, popular, Jewish mind of the time was, apparently, a sort of surly scepticism, a habit of angry and irreverent questioning of the ways of God. Malachi records a whole sheaf of such questions. 'Wherein hast Thou loved us?' 'Wherein have we wearied Thee?' 'Wherein have we robbed Thee?' 'What have we spoken so much against Thee?' 'Wherein have we despised Thy name?' In the passage just preceding the sentence before us to-day, we have the angriest
iii. 14, 15 outburst of all; 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.' All the while, be it remembered, these were the people who had been, after the captivity, in a wonderful course of loving providence, restored to their land, their city, their temple. The hand of God had been almost visible for them. Yet already they were talking the dialect of infidelity.

Is there not much in all this to remind us of some features of our own time? Spoken out, or compressed into gloomy silence, there is a great deal now of this arrogant questioning of God, the

God of the Word, the God of Providence, the God of Christ. Shocking are the loud outbreaks sometimes. 'We will listen to Jesus Christ, if He will behave Himself,' was actually said a few years ago, and it expressed ten thousand less articulately rebel thoughts. Only too often (does the Christian never know it in his own heart?) there swells up, very near the surface of even a religious mind, some fierce questioning of His messages, or of His actions, till the thought hovers in a wretched ambiguity between half-censure of His Character and half-denial of His Being. In distress and perplexity, sometimes, the Christian is driven to ask whether reverence and submission are vanished from (not only the world but) the Church. This may be, nay, it is, a hasty asking, based on very partial data. But the data are terribly prominent, though there is indeed, in the mercy of God, another side.

Certainly, if there ever really has been an 'age of faith,' in the sense of a time when eternal truths were accepted and cherished generally without misgiving, that age is not our own. Nor was it the age of Malachi either.

How beautiful against this dark background is the small but vivid picture of this verse! In those bad times, in poor, ungrateful, sceptical Jerusalem, there was an undying 'holy seed.' Living within sound of the godless questionings and defiances

were found 'they who feared the Lord.' Doubtless the Prophet was one of them, their centre and support. But they were each, individually, a man, a woman, in contact with God, through faith and fear, and therefore *alive*, amidst the stifling malaria of unbelief, and thanklessness, and scorn. Aye, and they were not content with individual contact with God, and personal spiritual life. They knew the blessing of communion, of converse, of strengthening one another's hands. So they often met for holy conference and colloquy. Perhaps it was under the Prophet's roof; perhaps it was on the slopes of Olivet, or looking down from its further side upon the Bethany which, centuries later, was to be the haunt of JESUS. But, however, somewhere, somehow, they 'spake often one to another.'

We can almost overhear them. They would 'speak often' of the glorious past of the ways of God; they would lead one another out into that 'open air' of His historic dealings of which we thought last week. They would remind one another of the troubled saints of other evil days, believing, suffering, triumphant. They would speak of the boundless proof of the mighty being and unchangeable purpose of the God of Abraham, and Moses, and David, and the Prophets. They would solemnly remind one another of their present personal certainty and experience of Him. Would

not one say to another, 'Whom have we in heaven but Him? There is none upon earth that we desire beside Him.' And then they would dwell upon the Promise and the Hope; Messiah would fill their souls, and kindle their words; and they would go out to live above the miserable level of the scorn and doubt around them. Psal. lxxiii. 25

Christian brother, let us do the like if we think the times are evil. We have all the topics of Malachi and his friends — and JESUS CHRIST, glorified and coming back, besides. Let us speak often one to another; the Lord is listening still.

XXV

Happy alone with Christ

'And he went on his way rejoicing.'—Acts viii. 39.

THIS was the Ethiopian eunuch, the man of great authority under Candace the queen, who had charge of all her treasure. We know well his memorable, his most beautiful story. All the way from Abyssinia, down the Nile, through the Egyptian cities, across the wastes, up the rising land to mountainous Jerusalem, he had travelled, to worship. At Jerusalem, apparently, he had seen no Christian; he had heard no word, certainly no friendly word, about Jesus. But he had worshipped, assuredly in spirit and in truth, and he possessed at least Isaiah as a written Word of God; perhaps he had procured the scroll in the city, and was now exploring his new treasure. There he sate, in his travelling carriage, moving along the solitary road, and reading, reading aloud, as Orientals commonly do. As he read the fifty-third chapter, the chapter of the Cross, a voice accosts and surprises him; 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' It is Philip, sent by his Lord to that unlikely spot, with an unerring choice of place and time. So

follows the conversation, the faith, the joy, the baptism in the wayside pool. And then—suddenly, in mystery, Philip is gone, and the new Christian is alone. 'The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more; and he,' the Ethiopian traveller, 'went on his way rejoicing.'

It was a strange close to that blessed interview. And part of the strangeness is the new convert's joy as he goes on, pursuing the vast journey homeward, to meet whatever might meet him there when he arrived, and to meet it alone.

Was it nothing to him to be left alone by his suddenly-found friend and teacher? We may be sure it was not. The very last thing the true Gospel does is to blunt human sensibilities and sympathies; it deepens them. We may modify the words of the grand song of the seventeenth century, and say, with a deep meaning :—

> 'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not JESUS more.'

And oh, how deep and tender are the human sympathies which are the immediate creation of the Gospel! Strong is the bond between the teacher and the taught, the helper and the helped, the human instrument of conversion and the convert, in the Gospel life. Most sure we may be that when Philip and the eunuch ascended from the pool and prepared to remount the carriage,

they felt their hearts one with a oneness which had never stirred the being of the African treasurer before. May we not lawfully imagine him preparing now to carry his beloved and loving teacher homeward with him, and to learn from him all along the way more of this wonderful, this blessed, Jesus, 'glad theme of rapt Isaiah,' the Bearer of our sins, and who sees the travail of His soul in our salvation?

Then on a sudden—Philip was gone. 'The Spirit caught him away.' We can only note the phrase; God only knows all it means. It may have been an actual rapture through the air. It may have been a removal by steps along the ground, but taken with superhuman speed. However, Philip was gone, and the eunuch has to make his way homeward, orphaned of him, probably for ever on earth.

Does not the experience of that moment come home? Who, that is no longer quite young, has not somehow lost a Philip? It may be the dear instructor who actually first led you to Jesus; perhaps a blessed parent, perhaps your teacher in the Sunday School, or in the Bible Class; your pastor, perhaps, or your college friend, or your aged neighbour, young with the love of God. Perhaps it is some helper further on upon your path; you felt a powerful 'lift' in your soul's life in that conversation with him, in that address, that

sermon he delivered, that letter he wrote to you. Or perhaps it has been simply the 'sweet influences' of his (or her) life, in and for the Lord, which have been used to bless you. Anywise, this friend has become very, very much to you, both in nature and in Christ. You love that face, that voice, that fellowship; and you justly love it. Then, the Spirit of the Lord has caught the friend away, perhaps to a distant place of life and duty, perhaps to the world to come. Alas, the blank which that going leaves! Life is lonelier all over for that one absence from it.

But now, look once more at the traveller. He is not weeping and wailing, and calling for Philip back again. Behold, the carriage, the cavalcade, is moving. They are off again for Abyssinia. And the new-baptized man beams in every look with joy. 'He went on his way rejoicing';

> 'For Philip indeed flies, but JESUS stays
> And travels with His friend.'

Yes, he has found the Lord, he possesses the Lord. Yesterday he had never heard of Him; to-day He is His happy servant's all in all. He has Him in the Book, revealed as his Sacrifice of peace, his Life of life. He has Him in the Ordinance, sealed to him as his own for ever. He has Him in his converted heart, living there, dwelling there, by faith. The dear Lord Jesus

Christ is travelling with him all the way to the court of Candace, and is going to live with him there. Philip is gone; but he has JESUS; and, what is noteworthy, in Jesus he has Philip still.

We need not elaborately point the moral. The Lord knows what the bitterness of our partings is. He has tasted the like griefs Himself. 'He knows, He knows.' But then, let us boldly say it to the silent earth and skies, 'He lives, He lives.' We have Him, and in Him all things, our blessed ones included. Come, let us go on our way, in our turn, rejoicing.

XXVI

Saved to Serve

'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.'—1 Cor. x. 23.

IF I read these words aright, they are a sort of dialogue. The Corinthian convert makes an assertion of his liberty; the Apostle meets it, not with a contradiction, but with a caution and counterbalance. 'All things are lawful for me; I have not to carry the burthen of seeking to earn my acceptance with God by a process of elaborate and regulated abstinence. I am an accepted child, in Christ, out and out. The whole liberty of the home-life is mine.' So says the Corinthian, founding his claim upon the teaching of St. Paul. And St. Paul unsays not one word of his teaching, any more than he does in Rom. vi. 1, where he similarly calls up a supposed interlocutor, who asks why, with so free a salvation, we may not go on sinning. He only bids his friend take another point of view, and look at the glorious truth in its proper perspective. 'Yes, all things are, in that respect, lawful to you. You say it, and you say it again,

and it is true. But then, the fact of freedom is one thing, the purpose and the use of it is another. You are placed amidst the delightful liberties and resources of your Father's home, without grudging and without doubt. But you are placed there not to enjoy only, but to use; not to be free only, but to have the privilege of contributing to the freedom around you. You are free—but as the child of a Father, and as the member of a family. And such freedom would be only the harsh parody of itself if it were not a freedom to love, to be loyal, to serve, to share. Your rights are given you as bright implements to promote the highest right. You are saved to be serviceable; you are saved to build up other lives. And not all things are serviceable. And not all things build the lives of others up. So, back to liberty, but not to licence. Live out the noble freedom of freely fulfilled mutual duty. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth, another's weal.'

This sort of dialogue, which may be thus expanded for exposition, meets us once and again in this Epistle. There is a striking example, in my view, in the sixth chapter, where the Apostle in the same way takes up an assertion, as made by a disputant or correspondent, and meets it with
1 Cor. vi. a counter-truth. 'All things are lawful unto me'—
13 'But I will not be brought under the power of any.'
'Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats;

appetites are as natural as the supply which feeds them'—'But God shall destroy both it and them; we are made for an ultimate life above material appetites; for that life let us live.' In fact, the great Epistle is, in its substance, one long series of apostolic answers to questions, more or less wise, from the agitated Mission-Church; and these are specimens.

To return to the questions and answers before us. In these short phrases we have set out, as tersely as possible, two profoundly contrasted views of the Christian life. And their contrast is the more remarkable because, in a certain sense, the disputants stand on common ground, and feel their footing on it. That ground is the grand Pauline truth of free salvation, in virtue, solely and entirely, of the finished work of Christ. This the Corinthian has learnt, and learnt eagerly, from St. Paul. And this truth is as dear as ever, and as vital and as strong as ever, for St. Paul himself. But the Corinthian takes it as if its purpose were to turn him loose upon the field of personal enjoyment, to give him an unencumbered licence to live as he pleases, to assert his rights, and be a man. The Apostle takes it as above all things an emancipation from—himself, a buying of him *out* of the self-slavery which is the inevitable inmost condition of unforgiven and unregenerated man, and a buying of him *in* to a service which is perfect

freedom, for it is the service of a beloved, welcomed, transformed, congenial son of the home. No one can assert the liberty of the justified and the regenerated more absolutely than St. Paul does. But never for a moment does he view it as liberty, so to speak, in the abstract, in the air. It is liberty in Christ. It is liberty with a law, the royal law of love, the law which means just the living out of the fact that I am no more my own, but the dear-bought property of the eternal Love.

Let us ponder these antithetical views, which, from their common ground, point in opposite directions, the one to the eternal night, the other to the eternal day. And let our whole Christian being be placed, more deliberately than ever, upon the side of the apostolic truth. Yes, we are free indeed. But in our freedom we exist for purposes which alone are worthy of that sacred word, freedom. We exist to be of service. We exist to build others up, to help others on, in the blessed life. Not a day, not an hour, of our lives lies outside that law. Not one personal habit, nay, not one personal habit of our most solitary and secret times (for everything tells upon character, which is our great implement for service), lies outside that law. Not an action of our wills, not an utterance of our lips, not a look of our eyes, but may have something to do with being serviceable, with building up, or with their

opposites. Let us remember it, and welcome it, and love it, and live it out. It will be a life not of bondage at all, but of perfect freedom—on one condition, that we are keeping in pure personal contact with HIM who is at once our Liberty and our Law; 'whom to know is to live, whom to serve is to reign.'

XXVII

Peace, perfect Peace

'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, in' [so render] 'Christ Jesus.'—Phil. iv. 7.

THIS is indeed a passage of beauty. There is a music, as of the spheres, about its very phrase. And it connects itself with moments, full of the beauty of holiness. Often we have heard it spoken at the close of our Sabbath worship, where the lamps have been lit, and the disciples have been gathered together, to praise, to pray, to hearken, and to go forth the calmer and the stronger for the week. Often we have heard it as we prepared to quit the precious Table of the Lord, when

> 'Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
> The feast, but not the love, is past and gone;
> The Bread and Wine depart, but Thou art near,
> Nearer than ever, still my shield and sun.'

Yes, the words and their connexions are full of a peculiar charm,

> 'Like setting suns, or music at the close.'

But we return to them with the question, are

they as strong as they are beautiful? Are they made for wear? Are they good not only for the Lord's Day evening, or for the hour of the divine feast of the slain and risen Redeemer, but also for Monday morning, and the clamour of the street, and the hurry of the shop, and the labour of the study, and the cares of the pastor or the master, and the woe of the mourner, and the last gaze of the dying?

It is easy to talk of that peace; it is easier to write about it. Is it easy to possess it, in the light of the perfectly common day, and of perfectly real trial?

Is it easy? Yes, and no. No, just so far as the call to surrender and to trust, seeing Him that is invisible, in this visible world of sin, is so far from easy to obey that no man can do it but by the Holy Ghost. But also yes, because the Holy Ghost is able to 'make all grace abound towards us,' that we may quite simply surrender, and quite simply trust. Yes, because He is able to glorify Jesus Christ to us, to present Him to us so that He is indeed a living, bright Reality to us. Peace is easy when its almighty Reason is full in our spiritual sight. 2 Cor. ix. 8

It may be not unhelpful to us to look at this promise of peace, in the Philippian Epistle, as illustrated by the personal example, at the time, of the writer of the Epistle. Apparently without

the least intention of doing so, St. Paul gives the Philippians, from his own experience, just then, at least three noble illustrations of the heart-keeping power of the peace of God. And in each case we see that the secret of the realization is simply this —Jesus Christ in full possession of the soul. Let us take them, one by one.

Two of the three experiences appear in the first chapter. The first has to do with an exquisite personal pain, caused by the trying and sinful conduct of an anti-Pauline clique among the Roman Christians. Sad as it is, it is yet true, that at that early date already the spirit of separatism was active in the Church. And certain persons were misguided enough to take such advantage of St. Paul's imprisoned position, and consequent total inability to move about among the disciples, as to work a propaganda of their own, not only independent of him, but hostile; 'preaching Christ of envy and strife; supposing to add affliction to his bonds.' It needs no unusual imagination to realize, in some measure, the extreme trial of such a circumstance, to see how it must have struck, through the personal sensibilities, deep at the root of peace. St. Paul was a Christian, not a Stoic, and he felt the pain, and quite clearly saw the wrong. But pain and peace are not necessarily contradictions. And the pain appears to have left St. Paul's divine peace unruffled, in the sense of

Phil. i. 15-18

wholly failing to produce in him that miserable 'worry' which *is* the contradiction to peace, for it is the white flag of surrender to trouble, the confession that we are *not* overcoming in our Lord. He rises over the trial to a serene contentment, nay, to a tranquil joy. 'What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and *shall* rejoice.' Paul is 'more than conqueror.' Phil. i. 18

Then emerges another assault upon peace. It is a very grave one. It is the dubious prospect of the issue of his trial in the Roman courts; it is the question of life or death. He does not yet, from his then permitted viewpoint, 'see how it will go with him.' He may be soon acquitted, released, and sent back to his beloved work. But he may be capitally condemned. The death-warrant may be handed in, almost any day. Is he thrown off the equilibrium of peace by this dread ambiguity of his lot? Far from it. He indulges himself in the luxury of an elaborate comparison of the two sides of his double wealth, his embarrassment of blessings! Life and death—each has for him an immense charm. And in each case the charm is Christ. 'To live is—Christ.' To die is—'to be with Christ, which is far better.' Paul is 'more than conqueror.' Phil. i. 21-25

Lastly, in the fourth chapter, we have another problem. It is, the experience of pecuniary want. Phil. iv. 10-14

That is a less heroic trial than the trial of a possible sentence of death. But who does not know something of its penetrating power, its awful temptation to a loss of peace? There is a weird story told, of a man who besought the wizard to call forth the great Enemy in visible form before him. He did so, and there fell upon the floor—an empty purse! But St. Paul has a peace unbroken by the shrinking of his little store. And
Phil. iv. 13 he lets us into the secret: 'I am strong for all things, in Him who gives me power.'

Reader—and writer—the peace of God is made for wear. Its texture is such that it need not be torn, even by the toothed wheels of this world. And it shall not be torn by them, if for us its secret is not an abstraction but a Person, the Saviour and Master of Paul; Jesus, our Peace.

XXVIII

The Express Image

'The brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.'—Heb. i. 3.

HERE is set before us the SON, the blessed SON of the FATHER. 'In' Him the Father has, 'in these last days, spoken to us,' and He has, 'by Himself, purged our sins.' He, being thus the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, has, after His great sacrifice for us, and in consequence of it, 'sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.'

So opens the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is one long discourse upon the glory of Christ, and His all-sufficiency for the believer, above all as 'our Priest, our great Melchisedek.' This first chapter is occupied with the theme of His Godhead, the second with that of His Manhood; then opens and developes the sublime presentation of His offices of grace and love, till at length He stands before us, He walks amongst us, in all His risen power, with all His covenant blessings, as 'the great Shepherd of the sheep.' Heb. xiii. 20

But to-day, in our quiet Sunday meditation,

we will not wander far afield in the rich Epistle, we will dwell upon one point only. That point is a star of the first magnitude in the heaven of Christian truth; it will well repay our undivided attention. It is the assurance given us here, that the holy Son of God, who for us men became Man, and for ever now bears our nature as His own, is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person.

Let us look into this wonderful assurance. I am not about to discuss its terms in critical detail. The Greek of the second clause, particularly the word rendered 'Person,' lends itself to such discussion in the proper place. But I do not think there is need for such enquiries here. Whatever be the result of verbal criticism in detail, the general effect of the words will be found to remain the same in this respect, that they are intended to tell us that in the Son we have the exact and adequate Representation of the Father. As regards 'glory,' as regards the light and splendour of divine Being and of Character, as is the Father so is the Son. In respect of what the Father is, the Son is His express image. The Greek word rendered 'express image' means, properly, the impress left by a seal. The impress of a seal shows only, and exactly, and fully, what the seal is, as to its device. Even so the blessed Son, seen by us, shows us not partially but fully, not approximately but

exactly, what the Father is. As is the Father, so is the Son.

This to be sure is obvious and primary Christian truth, confessed in one form or another by all orthodox people. But am I wrong in thinking that it is a truth which needs to be taken up sometimes, and looked at afresh, with a purpose deeply practical? If I judge aright, if I guess truly at all at the minds of others from my own, it is so. It is not an unknown thing among Christians, to think, perhaps rather to *feel*, as if there were a certain difference between the character of the Father and the character of the Son. Such feeling sometimes takes the line of an emphasis upon the tenderness and gentleness of the blessed Son, with a certain forgetfulness of the side of stern and solemn power which He presents when in face of man's sin not repented of, above all of man's sin veiled under the mask of religion. Sometimes, on the other hand, this half unconscious feeling about a difference between the Son and the Father tends to emphasize the mystery, the invisibility, of the Father, till it seems, I had almost said, to be an 'aloofness,' an isolation, hiding within itself we know not what elements other than the revealed. And then thought fastens upon the Son less as the Way to the Father than as (may I dare to say it, without irreverence?) a preferable substitute for Him in our thought,

and to our hearts. In the Son we behold a character which, in a sense, we know, we see, we can wholly rest in, we can embrace. In the Father, we seem to see, too often, more of an inscrutable Mystery than an eternal Heart; almost 'the Unknown and Unknowable.'

This is no mere modern aberration. In the early days of the Church some of the most subtle errors of thought took very much this line. To the 'Gnostic,' the ultimate eternal Being was entirely unknowable. 'The Christ' was, in his view, one out of many sublime (but lower) existences who made man capable of some part and lot in the eternal world.

How entirely is the whole Gospel of the grace of God in contradiction to such dreams! How nobly they are scattered by even this one ray of eternal daylight, this passage before us here!

John i. 18 True, 'no man hath seen GOD at any time,' in His essential glory. But then, 'the only begotten SON, who is in the bosom of the Father, He *hath* declared Him.' He *hath* told us exactly, fully, finally, His character; nay, He hath *displayed* it; for He is the 'express image' of it, the true Impress of the celestial Seal.

Think it simply out, with rest and with thanksgiving. In the mystery of Eternal Existence there must be, for ever and ever, depths unknown. But in the splendour of Eternal Character there

is nothing which, in the Lord Jesus Christ, is not revealed. There is nothing concealed, different, alien, in the Father, which is not manifested in the Son. All the holiness of the Father, all His omnipotence, all His omniscience, is in the Son. And then, equally, all the love that is in the Son, all the compassion, all the tenderness, all the care for the weakest, and the most ignorant, and the most wandering, is in the Father. As absolutely as the Son, He loves to save, He yearns over the lost, He calls the wanderer to come. There is no colder central region behind the warmth of the Name of Jesus. He is the 'own Son' of the Blessed. He is exactly like His Father, who loved Him before the foundation of the world. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed, and also beloved, be Thy Name, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Rom. viii. 32

XXIX

The Christian as Evidence to Christ

'Glorified in His saints.'—2 Thess. i. 10.

SOME time ago I experienced one of those moments of mental trial which are known, if I mistake not, to most Christians, sooner or later, more or less. Perhaps I should use a more complex word than *mental* to describe what I mean. It was a trial to faith and hope, to conscious certainty about the things unseen and eternal, which was compounded of several elements besides the element of the understanding. Emotion had to do with it, no doubt, and some physical conditions too. However, it was, in the strictest sense of the word, a trying experience; it *tried* the spirit, by demanding answers to such questions as 'Yea, hath God said?' What is the reason of the hope?' 'Where is the promise of His coming?'

One solemn comfort at such moments is the recollection that the very saints of God, in other days as in our own, have known such hours. Asaph knew them, as he tells us fully and candidly, in the seventy-third Psalm. Job knew

them, and Jeremiah. I have little doubt that St. Paul knew them. In days much nearer our own, Payson knew them. 'I have sometimes mounted the pulpit,' says Payson, 'while a dread whisper was heard in my heart, *Is there a God at all?*' Yet Payson was the means of innumerable conversions, during his ministry so weighted with physical suffering. And when he came to die, he affirmed with calm and beaming looks, that he almost literally saw the Holy City, and felt the fragrance of the immortal air around him, while death looked merely a narrow runnel in the foreground, to be crossed by a single step.

Let us never, for one moment, *cherish* the experience of difficulty in belief, as if there were anything great or deep in it of itself. It always, necessarily, comes of knowing not too much but too little; of seeing as yet not deep enough. But if the experience is upon us, let us take the fact as *a trial*. And the Apostle tells us that 'the trial of our faith is precious' in its effects, if it is rightly met. 1 Peter i.7

I allude thus far to a personal incident of the soul only to give point to what seems to me to be the lesson of its sequel. About the time in question I had been reading some pages of a book by the late Dr John Ker, one of my best-loved authors, a bright ornament not only of the Scottish Church, but of the Church of Christ

at large; a deep, luminous thinker, a man of wide cultivation, and a believing witness to the Lord who had tasted deep of the trials of both physical and mental pain. I do not remember now what the topic was which he handled in the passages I had read. But I did, and do, remember the living impression left on me by the writer; the depth of insight, the large and tender sympathy, the practical wisdom, the admirable power of suggestion and counsel, and, shining through all, the presence in the man's entire mind of the influence of his MASTER, moulding, animating, giving a character which raised and sanctified the whole.

Then the thought occurred to me that a man like this is, in himself, in what he is, a testimony to the existence and to the character of Christ, of God in Christ. He is no self-originated phenomenon. He is an effect, he is a product, he is a stream; and as the stream, so the fountain. To begin with, here is a person, a thinking, willing, purposing, understanding person. This stream flows then from a Spring which, whatever else it contains, contains at least this, which I observe under my eyes in the stream—Personality. Ker, and such as he, great and beautiful as they are in their personality, are, with equal clearness and certainty, not the mere highest results of lower grades of being, with nothing above them, the crown and end of all things. Their very nature is

to look up, and to know that 'He hath made us, and not we ourselves.' They come forth, and from a higher Source. They are evidences, by what they are, to It.

This reflection is of course at once extended and intensified when we think not only on the phenomenon of a rich personality, but on what we can only call the beauty of the holiness of a genuine and deeply taught Christian personality. This is a phenomenon which, we may be reasonably sure, in the deepest sense of the word 'reason,' points upwards to a supreme and *kindred* source. A John Ker is an enigma without an answer, a negation of the highest reason, except as the effect, the product, the child, of a Holy God, Himself beautiful in His holiness.

Take this thought out into the wide field of Christian history. We have looked at one instance of a vast phenomenon, isolated for the moment. But such a life is not isolated. It is part of an immense system of phenomena, which, to think of the Christian centuries alone for the moment, extends from Paul, and Polycarp, and Monica, and Augustine, to Anselm, Bernard, Tauler, Huss, and on to Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Ridley, and on to Herbert, Bunyan, Pascal, Guyon, Fenelon, and on to Watts, Wesley, Whitefield, Newton and Simeon, and on to Thomas Scott, Elizabeth Fry, Chalmers, Neff, Oberlin, McCheyne,

Vinet, Monod, till we come to Patteson, and Hannington, and the martyrs of 1900 in the Far East. These, and the quite countless Christians whom they represent, the vast nebula behind the stars, with endless differences in other things, are alike in this, that they present themselves to us naturally, consistently, unanimously, as effects of a common Cause, the outcome of a Source infinitely higher but necessarily kindred. They bear traces of that Origin in their very existence. They are rays diffused from an Archetype, and they lead our eyes backward and upward towards its brightness.

As sure as the existence of the saints, so sure is the existence of their Saviour. The Christ of the Gospel is at the same moment the Christ of history and the Christ of experience. Let us
1 Pet. i. 13 gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and hope to the end.

XXX

Onesimus

'That thou shouldest receive him for ever.'—Philem. 15.

HOW beautiful is that miniature picture in the gallery of the New Testament, the Epistle to Philemon! Even non-Christian critics have praised its perfect literary charm. It has often been compared with a somewhat similar letter of intercession to an offended master, written some years later, by that perfect gentleman in the Roman sense, the younger Pliny. And the Christian Apostle cannot but come victorious out of the competition, so perfect is the tact, so fine the feeling, so large and deep the kindness, so kind the dignity, of his little letter to Philemon. Nor need we wonder, for he had over Pliny the immeasurable advantage of that education of the whole being, mind and feeling included, which comes with 'knowing Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.' Phil. iii. 10

But to-day we will not study the precious document; we will fix our thoughts upon one person, the most conspicuous person mentioned

in it. We will consider Onesimus, and Onesimus as a lesson and a type.

Onesimus is to us now an immortal name. As long as the Bible lasts that name will live with it, and will live to be studied and to be loved. Yet Onesimus was once a being low among the degraded and the wretched of his time. He was a slave, in the old Greek slavery, which left the human chattel, as nearly as possible, to the merest mercy of his—of its—owner. And let the owner be never so good-natured, still the iron, or rather the cancer, of the chattel-character would go deep into the slave's soul. And Onesimus was probably a Lydian by birth, and Lydian slaves were a proverb for exceptional badness, that is, for a full receptivity of the worst personal effects of slavery. No wonder that he proved (as it seems, ver. 18) a dishonest servant, and at length a runaway.

This is no place to examine the problems raised by the attitude of the Apostles towards slavery. It must be enough to say here, as some critics by no means too orthodox have said, that that attitude showed a prescient wisdom of the highest kind. It absolutely and always declined to meddle with revolution, while it was incessantly teaching principles of the spiritual order which led to lasting and profound reform. Meanwhile, it tolerated the existing system of society ; and so St. Paul evidently regarded it as Onesimus' duty to go back to his

master, and 'submit himself under his hands.' Only, he sent, along with him, the Epistle to Philemon!

We seem to see the fugitive going back. He has had strange, probably terrible, experiences of human misery since he left Colossæ. Somehow, he has found his way, through such adventures as an escaped slave might expect, to Rome; Rome, the moral sink of the then world. But at Rome, we know not how, he has found his way to Paul's chamber door, and there, in due time, he has found the Lord Jesus. The imprisoned Apostle has 'begotten him'; that is, he has been the ver. 10
means of the poor fellow's new birth by the Holy Ghost. Onesimus goes back to Colossæ, because he is 'a new creature in Christ Jesus,' and because it is the law of the new creature's being to do right, to do the will of God in the next thing.

So he arrives. He is not exactly a prodigal son. Legally, he is an escaped slave, caught again (by his own conscience), and in his old master's power. Spiritually, however, he is a prodigal *brother*, yea, 'a brother beloved.' And if we read ver. 16
Philemon aright, through the hints of his character given us by the letter addressed to him, he would meet Onesimus in a spirit very different from that of the elder brother of that other prodigal. He would grasp his hand, and welcome him *home*; and so would Apphia, and Archippus too.

But what would Onesimus feel, and what would he do? Here again we may turn with some confidence to 'read between the lines' of the Epistle, and to read alongside of them that bright, beautiful phrase of the larger Letter to the
Col. iv. 9 Colossians, written at the same time: 'Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.' Paul did not write lightly in such terms. Converted Onesimus must have risen into a noble Christian character, true and lovable. How would such a man, with exactly his past, go back to his injured master?

Most certainly to do anything but take airs, and pose as the representative of 'fraternity, equality.' He would have nothing to say for himself, everything against himself. He would long to be more than ever at the entire service of Philemon. To Philemon he now was joined by a spiritual bond strong as the Lord could make it, but therefore all the more, not the less, he recognized him as, *in Christ*, far more than in law, his appointed director and disposer. Nothing in daily duty would be too humble or too menial for his wishes. And what he did, menial or not, would be done
Eph. vi. 6, 7 in a totally new way; 'from the soul, as unto the Lord,' 'with good will doing service'; loving everything in the daily round, for Jesus' sake.

'We are all the Lord's Onesimi.' So says blessed Luther, in his vivid way. Is it not so?

The slavery of man to man is a condition impossible to reconcile permanently with God's will. The slavery of man to God in Christ, the absolute 'belonging,' the entire surrender, the supreme and irresponsible disposal, is a thing of eternal right, and is the condition for ever precedent to man's noblest freedom. And we have run away. And we have been found again, and have somehow come back to our divine Colossæ, to our divine Philemon. And He, blessed be His name, has not upbraided us, still less has consigned us to torture or the scourge. He has not been ashamed to call us brethren, and to treat us as such indeed. But meanwhile, if only for our own bliss, He cannot abdicate His master-character. He gives us the joy of 'serving Him for ever.' See Exod. xxi. 6

How shall we meet it, receive it, and taste its happiness? By loving everything about His household, and in His service, and the humblest things most, for His sake. By asking never, never again, to be allowed to run away into the wretched world from our dear Colossæ. By seeking to live and serve every hour, thankful, faithful, perfectly possessed, perfectly free, under the very eyes of our divine Philemon.

XXXI

Whence came they?

'And whence came they?'—Rev. vii. 13.

THE environment of this short question is as familiar as it is magnificent. It occurs in that great apocalyptic vision where St. John sees an uncounted multitude gathered before the throne, robed in white, and bearing the palms which to Hebrew thought would symbolize an immortal Feast of Tabernacles, the rest and triumph of the eternal Country, the better Canaan, after the desert and the river. There they stand, and there they sing to their Lord the great anthem of their salvation:

> 'Loud as from members without number, sweet
> As from blest voices, uttering joy; heaven rings
> With jubilee, and loud Hosannas fill
> The eternal regions.'

Then did one of the glorified 'Elders' ask the Seer this question, who they were, and whence they came; and went on to answer it himself. These happy singers had come 'out of the great tribulation, and had washed their robes in the

blood of the Lamb; therefore they were before the throne of God.'

This vision, and so this question with its answer, have no doubt a first and particular reference. I am one of those who hold the Revelation of St John to be just what it professes to be, no mere rhapsodical utterance (as some would make it) of the best thoughts of the Apostle, at a crisis of persecution, setting out in symbolical forms the general principles of Christian hope and courage. I hold it to be a veritable vision, divinely given, of the long future of the Church, written down at the Redeemer's own bidding for our study, and faith, and prayerful expectation. And I take 'the great tribulation' here to be thus, primarily, an awful foreseen time of trial, perhaps yet to come, and the white multitude with the palm and the song to be, primarily, the sufferers of that time.

Yet all through this book of mystery and light we may trace also another aspect. Through the primary and the particular may be seen the larger, the universal, which corresponds. Permanent facts of the kingdom of God are given to us all along under the types of the events foretold; so that the Revelation, apart from its predictive aspect, forms one of the richest of all the Biblical mines of moral and spiritual teaching. One example of this we certainly have here. The Elder's question we may quite lawfully take with a reference wide

enough to touch all the lives, in all ages, which have reached a bright eternity. We may listen for the answer, as for a message for every one, ourselves included, who prays, who hopes, who looks, to be with the Lord hereafter.

'Whence came they?' 'They' are glorified spirits in heaven.

> 'Our knowledge of that life is small,
> The eye of faith is dim.'

I cannot imagine what a spirit is,' said Charles Simeon, on his death-bed, at Cambridge; 'I have no conception of it; though I know that in a few days I shall, by the mercy of God, join the company of the redeemed above.' It is even so; 'we cannot imagine'; 'we have no conception.' One moment's happy experience will tell us, relatively, all. And the fact of the prospect is inestimably precious, and can be really grasped by loving faith because the essence of it is revealed in sublimely *personal* terms; it is just this, 'to be *with Christ*,' in a sense conscious and supreme. But as to detail, we can only say, 'it doth not yet appear.' What it will be like, to be where the very causes of grief, of fear, of decay, of death, the very occasions of trial, above all the very possibility of sin, shall 'be swallowed up of life,' so that the *beata necessitas boni*, the blessed necessity of good, shall be the free law of joy for ever—this, indeed,

'doth not yet appear.' We 'look for the life of the world to come,' but with the eyes not of imagination, but of faith, as faith sees the Person, the Word, and the Work of the risen and everlasting Christ.

So the *where* and the *whither* of the coming blessedness is hidden. But not so the *whence*. 'Whence came they' to that infinitely desirable Land unseen? Here is our point. They came from earth, and time, and common human life, from scenes the most common, concrete, familiar; from all that makes up the poor annals of our mortality from the cradle to the grave. 'Whence came they' to the City of the Hereafter? From precisely the things which we, their successors, find around us in the ordinary daylight here. From being children in their mothers' arms; from 'youth's new years of many a fitful change'; from unheroic, unpoetic trials and temptations; from disappointments, and mistakes, and many a failure; from convictions of their own heart's sin; from pangs of repentance in which they saw themselves to be, in themselves, the very opposite of saints; from asking not, How shall I be glorified, and wear an aureole, and bear a palm, but, What must I do to be saved? They came from discoveries of JESUS as their own, not in mere ecstasies of fitful emotion, but with an indescribable harmony of seriousness and wonder, and so

as to see that in the act of being embraced by Him they passed into His absolute possession, to be His servants for ever. They came from no dreamer's paradise of soft 'religionism,' nor from any brittle and unseemly pedestal of self-advertizing excellence, but from a life given up humbly to do the next right thing rightly, in the Lord's strength, for His dear sake. They came from rising up in the morning not to try to be heroic, but to pray to be faithful, and most faithful in the most common hour; from living out the ordinary day as those who were indeed not ashamed to be known to love their Redeemer, and who could be seen to find in Him a law and a power which sweetened and uplifted the whole action of life, producing that great result, the Christian character, full orbed in humbleness, light and strength. They reached the summit a step at a time. Some of them sometimes found that the next step led them into great tribulation indeed, into agonies of personal grief, exquisite pangs of slander or contempt, or such violence of terror and death as thousands upon thousands of our fellow-Christians in China were called to only last summer,[1] while we were spending, perhaps, a pleasant holiday. But most of them, at most times, took the next step, in the name of Jesus, into commonplace duties,

[1] Written in 1901.

which yet all were occasions for loving and doing the will of God in the strength and freedom of the Spirit of His Son.

It is written of the Holy City that its 'street' is 'pure gold, like unto transparent glass'; glorious image of a state of action and intercourse where the true and the beautiful coalesce absolutely and for ever. The road to the City is often rough with flints, and clogged with mire, and dark with shadows of the valley. But when the road runs up to the gate at last, it passes on through it, in one line, into the golden street. No gulph divides them. It is a transfiguration. Grace, used humbly and in fear, is one in essence with the glory that is to be revealed.

Rev. xxi. 21

XXXII

The Robe and the Wearer

'The Lord shall rejoice in His works.'—Psalm civ. 31.
'I will be glad in the Lord.'—Psalm civ. 34.

A Holiday Meditation

PERHAPS this Sunday finds my reader taking rest, seeking recreation, in the true sense of that word, a *re-creation* of the strength of body and mind for the will of God in common duty, amidst some grand or pleasant scene of His handiwork.

Is it by the English sea, or the English lake, or on the Scottish heather, or amidst the fair green hills of Ireland? Is it in the Norwegian fiord, or in the German forest, or near the ice-rivers of the Alps?

In any such case, the Christian will not be at rest if he does not take care that the holiday is also a holy-day. He will remember to invite, very particularly, the presence of the Master in the most completely leisure moments of the faithful servant. For never, never, thanks be to the beloved Master, is the servant out of service, wherever he is; he carries with him, inseparably, and as part of himself, the service which is perfect freedom.

To-day we will cherish and develope this recol-

lection by some simple thoughts upon our double motto from the Word. Let us ponder its two parts, as they may be pondered amidst the glories of Nature.

1. 'The Lord shall rejoice in His works.' Let this be remembered, let this sink into the soul, as we with our human eyes look upon those works to-day. Is it quiet beauty, the peaceful curve of 'the far-foamed sands,' or the mirror of the inland water, where the woods and hills glass themselves? Is it majestic beauty, where the glacier winds between the black precipices, and the snowy summit lifts the eye half-way to heaven? Is it the glances of the sunrise, or the ineffable beauty of the after-glow, the *Alpengluth*? O Christian visitor to these fair scenes, do not be afraid to rejoice in them. Do not think that an intense, profound, soul-filling enjoyment of Nature need for one moment be the 'nature-worship' which puts Nature in the place of God. Rightly entertained, that is to say, entertained with a full, tranquil recollection of Him, that enjoyment may be one form of close communion with the very thought of God. For what says our Scripture-word to-day? 'The Lord shall rejoice in His works.'

Yes, according to the Scriptures, which are full of the noblest passages on the splendour of creation, the beauty and the fulness of creation are a positive joy to the Creator. '*Verily, He hath taste!*' said Hugh Miller, finding on a mountain

edge in the Grampians an exquisite flower, sown and nourished where no human eye, but by rarest accident, could behold it. He felt, with a flash of Christian intuition, that the eternal Observer had a joy in Nature all His own; that solitary flower was a pleasure to the Lord. His conviction was perfectly Scriptural. 'The Lord shall rejoice in His works,' with a joy personal and vivid, a joy to which our enjoyment is but as the dew-drop to the river.

Take a holy and unfearing pleasure, then, Christian friend, in the scene of light, and colour, and noble line and form around thee. It is the robe of thy King and Friend, wrought by His hand, adjusted by His touch, pleasant to His eyes. True, a day will come when He will mysteriously
Ps. cii. 26 change it; 'as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed.' But till then these heavens and this green earth *are His vesture*, as truly as the new heavens and the new earth will be His vesture hereafter. With Him, rejoice in them. Let their power of beauty flow through your soul. Make your holiday a holy-day by entering into the rejoicing of the Maker in the thing that He has made.

And remember while you do so that 'Nature' is the work not merely of God in the abstract, but of God in Christ. The fields, and hills, and woods, and waters, the sun and the changing moon, the

stars and clouds, are Christian. For 'of the Son He saith' 'they are the works of Thy hands'; 'without Him was not anything made that was made.' Heb. i. 8, 10; John i. 3

2. But then there is the other side. 'I will be glad in the Lord.' We have seen how freely the Christian may rejoice in Nature without one unwholesome tinge of a false and pagan 'nature-worship' in the joy. But this is on one condition, namely, a 'joy in the Lord' which rules and hallows the other. The robe is glorious, nay, it is dear with a wonderful lovableness, because it is wrought and is worn by Him. But that means, of course, that there is something to His servant infinitely more glorious, and more dear, than the robe; that something is, the Heart that lives behind it.

So let us return to our joy in Nature through the avenue of a renewed and deepened joy in the Lord. Let our meditation be much of Him; it will be sure to be sweet.[1] Let us look for His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and drink that blessed light deep into our thankful spirits. Then, all the more largely, and all the more safely, 'in that light we shall see light,' the light of a beauty which gives joy to God, in the river, in the shore, in the field of flowers, the field of snow, the sunset and the stars.

[1] Perhaps the Hebrew should be rendered there, 'My meditation shall be sweet *unto Him*'; another side of truth, and a precious one.

XXXIII

One in Christ

'There s neither Greek nor Jew.'—Col. iii. 11.

THE triumphs of the Gospel are many and various, alike in the individual and in the world. Among them, how striking, how beautiful, how supernatural, is its triumph shown in the fusion of sympathies across all the barriers of race! Let us think a while of this, as we see it illustrated in this short sentence of St. Paul's, remembering who wrote the sentence, and who they were to whom he wrote it.

St. Paul was the consummate example of 'the Jew.' By training, by tradition, by every influence which builds up character, he was out and out a Jew. Up to his conversion, the whole development of his life was an intensive development, towards the Law, and towards 'the hedge of the Law,' the traditions; towards every belief and every practice which was built into 'the middle wall of partition' between a sacred Israel and a profane outer world. The practical issue in his thought and habits must have been remarkable. St. Peter was by no means so fully formed a zealot as St.

Eph. ii. 14

Paul. Yet St. Peter, years after his conversion, long after his Lord's glorification, was still in such a mental position that never, till he entered the house of Cornelius, had he seen his way to take a meal with a Gentile. Think of the general state of non-sympathy which such a conviction (unknown to the Old Testament) surely indicates. What interchange in even superficial modes of friendship was there likely to be between a Simon, still more between a Saul of Tarsus, and human beings born and brought up in the very heart of Gentilism? Acts x. 28

Now the Colossians were exactly such persons. They were, in the very broad sense of the word, 'Greeks'; a race of Western Asia Minor, speaking Greek as at least the tongue of external intercourse, and pagan by quite immemorial tradition. By no faintest link of nationality, habit, sentiment, worship, had they any contact with Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. To them, what were the temple, and the law? Nothing; or at most the dimly-rumoured peculiarities of another Asiatic people, who of course had a religion of their own.

Humanly speaking, in the order of nature, how unlikely was any close contact of heart between a developed Pharisee and a Colossian! Yet here is the phenomenon before us, an accomplished fact. This Epistle is the message of the Pharisee to the Colossians. And it is a message which does

very much more than convey information, and state principles. It does much more even than affirm that 'there is neither Greek nor Jew.' It is itself a living instance of the fact. For the heart of the writer is in complete contact with the hearts of the readers. They perfectly understand one another. Their sympathies are fused into the most delightful unity. The Pharisee gives his whole self out to the Colossians. He not only loves them; he lives for them, he lives, as to his spirit, with them. All that they are, all that they think, all that may affect their life and their belief, is supremely important to him. And plainly he is writing as to those whose hearts are reciprocal to his own. They have come to know him with an intimacy more than brotherly. He writes to them as to extensions of himself, responses to himself.

I dare to say that a phenomenon like this was a new thing upon the earth in those days, and a most wonderful thing. And one reason, and one only, is adequate to account for it; the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, the Apostle inevitably closes the sentence which begins, 'there is neither Greek nor Jew,' with the truth which makes it actual, 'Christ is all, and in all.'

That blessed victory over human isolation, in the name of the Lord Jesus, has been going on ever since. It is in progress everywhere to-day. In India, it literally joins the Pariah Christian arm-

in-arm in the street with the Brahman Christian. In Europe, at a gathering of Christian students, in 1895, at the Wartburg, just at the moment when America and Spain were in mortal conflict, it clasped the hands of the American delegate and the Spanish delegate with a genuine brotherhood. It is a power which developes, to noblest results, all pure patriotism. But it transcends the restrictions of land and race with a heavenly force and ease in favour of the unity of souls in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Sacred, wonder-working Gospel! Where man needs to learn how rightly to stand alone, there is no power like the Gospel to enable him to do so, aye, against a world in arms. Putting the soul into absolutely direct contact with God in Christ, nothing between, it not only sets him upon the eternal Rock; it incorporates him with its living strength. But then, where man needs the largest fusion with his fellow-men, where, strong in God, he is called to be at the service of his brother, the Gospel is the secret for this also. The heart which has admitted Christ to dwell in it, already begins to dilate with His glory. Knowing Him, and in His light knowing itself, it knows other hearts too in a new way, a way at once penetrating and full of love. It is open, it is accessible, it is amalgamable, under the touch of Christ. It gives itself out, in Him. And then there is neither Greek nor Jew; He is all and in all.

XXXIV

Stepping by the Spirit

'If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also step.'—Gal. v. 25 (literally rendered).

SO I would render this verse, rather than read it as in the Authorized Version, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' That reading does indeed express eternal truth, but not quite the truth of the Greek original. The Spirit, in the Greek, is regarded as the instrument, the means, of the life and the walk, rather than as the sphere; it speaks of a life and action *by* Him, rather than *in* Him. And the Greek verb of motion is not that which denotes progress generally; it is that which denotes the taking of steps, the moving along step by step.

On this last point let us think to-day. What to us is the message of this precept, 'by the Spirit let us also step?'

On the first great truth of the verse, 'life by the Spirit,' I hardly touch at all. Let that be largely taken for granted, as our faith, and our experience. 'By the Spirit,' by the eternal Spirit, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of grace, we, 'dead in trespasses

and sins,' must be 'quickened,' brought to life, if we are to live in and to the Lord. 'The Lord, the Life-Giver,' as the Nicene Creed nobly calls Him, must give that life to man, by putting man into vital contact with Him who is our Life. Then, and only then, Eph. ii. 1

> 'Our quicken'd souls awake and rise
> From the long sleep of death,
> On heavenly things we fix our eyes,
> And praise employs our breath.'

But all this the Apostle takes for granted. He brings it in as a ground of argument, with the argumentative 'if.' It is the assumed fact on which is now planted the inference of conduct; 'by the Spirit let us step,' let us take step after step by Him.

Here are two messages for us, as practical as possible. One is, the sacredness of the details of life. The other is, the promise of nothing less than the Holy Spirit's power as our resource for a holy walk in detail.

1 'Let us *step*.' Do we Christians adequately remember the importance of the single steps of a life which in any sense worth naming calls itself Christian? The vast majority of the incidents of life are of the nature of steps; not leaps, nor flights, but steps. And not one of them, no, not one, in its moral importance, is nothing. The merest trick of habit is helping, more or less, to form character. The mere habit of carelessness

about stepping is itself a series of steps which may conduct us with terrible precision to a goal of moral disaster. And look at it from another side; it is upon our little steps, more than on more general aspects of our life, that the observation of those around us is commonly engaged, consciously or not. Character, purpose, temper, the texture of the man's *morale*, is often much more surely indicated by his everyday steps than by some great feat of life in which he seems to spring or to fly. Christian friend, your minor life-movements are pretty sure to be noticed; your temper under petty trials, your fidelity under small engagements, your attention to simple claims of kindness, your habits at table, your activity or sloth in the morning, your use of the tongue in off-hours, particularly about other persons and their faults. Who shall reckon up the significance of steps? They are great things, in their littleness. They are great in power upon our own life. They are great in the impression they make upon those who surround our life, and see it.

2. 'By the Spirit let us step.' The Apostle directs us to no lower secret. Do we want to do fully right in the little things of life? We may do something to modify the surface, imperfectly indeed, but something, by natural means. But do we want to do the fulness of right in the smallest things? Do we want to glorify God in the common hour?

Stepping by the Spirit

Do we ask that our steps may, in some humble measure, leave a track of Christian light and love behind them? Then nothing short of the supreme secret will do. It must be by the Holy Spirit.

This means much for us in the way of recollection, and of purpose, and of the prayer of faith. It means that we must indeed awaken ourselves, and keep awake, with ever renewed persistency, to the momentousness of little things; not miserably, not morbidly, but seriously, so as to realize habitually that they are *worthy of* the help of God Himself. It means the cultivation of a habit of prayer, the prayer which is just faith expressing itself to its blessed Object, and expecting that He will be as good as His word, filling us with His Spirit. Yes, a life in which, 'by the Spirit, we step,' must be a life which is in earnest for the Lord, and willing to take pains for His sake.

But is it not infinitely worth the while? Is not this the only happy life after all? It is a life which moves along a path paved with the greatest promises that God has given. It walks, it steps, along that pavement in the companionship of the Holy One. It advances in the light, and to the light, 'shining more and more unto the perfect day.' It is the true walk with God. And its end is an Enoch-translation, to walk and please Him, with faultless steps, in the land of life for ever.

Prov. iv. 18

XXXV

Communion Thoughts

'Ye do proclaim the Lord's death, till He come.'—1 Cor. xi. 26 (literally rendered).

LET us ponder together some of the simplest, sweetest, deepest messages of the precious Communion, the Supper of the Lord. Many controversies have gathered around that quiet place of peace and blessing, the holy Table. But to-day we will shut these all out, and ask our Master to meet us, as if within those chamber-doors of old, where the disciples were gathered together, and on a sudden they heard the voice of their Beloved, 'Peace be unto you.'

As the ages roll and gather, is not the Communion yet more and more desirable and full of blessing? Not least when the believer has had some special trial to belief, when the things unseen and eternal have seemed as if remote and shadowy, when the joy of Bethlehem and of the garden of the Resurrection has felt for the moment a chill from surrounding indifference or denial, when the love of many has seemed to be waxing cold—then has not the sacramental Ordinance met us as with

the very touch of God? Again the glorious solidity of everlasting fact is conveyed, as it were, through our very senses to our soul. The Bread and the Wine are not a myth; nor is their history, up to its very origin, obscure for one single step. The first Lord's Supper lives, identical and immortal, in the Lord's Supper of this Sunday. And in it lives all He did, all He said, all He was, and is, and is to be; 'the same yesterday, to-day, for ever.' Heb. xiii. 8 If the shadows are really to deepen around the Church, as denials of the faith grow more frequent and open *within* the Church, will not the radiance of the blessed Table shine ever brighter to the believing, to those who in any measure know HIM, till it is lost in the radiance of His Return?

And now to gather up some of its precious messages.

1. '*Ye do proclaim* the Lord's Death.' That is, as I believe, ye do proclaim it, ye do tell the tidings of it, to one another. I know that many Christians hold another meaning, and take the Apostle to teach us that we 'proclaim' the death, pleading its merits in the Ordinance, before the Father's throne, and to Him. As I said above, I attempt no discussions here. All that I am now concerned to say is, that a 'proclamation' to one another *is* assuredly one great end of the Ordinance, and a most precious end. As instituted, the holy Service is nothing if not social, mutual. Scripture

knows nothing of a solitary Eucharist. Therefore the rite has a *mutual* significance; it has some sacred thing to say, all round the circle, Christian to Christian. By his presence, by his partaking, 'each is then a herald to the rest,' telling it out that Jesus did indeed die, to rise again.

2. 'Ye do proclaim *the Lord's Death*.' That is the central message. The *mortal* is the *vital* here. It is not, He was born, was made Man, lived, wrought, taught, blessed the poor sinful world by the touch of His feet, and the look of His fair countenance, and the words such as man never spoke before. It is, that He died. It is, that Gethsemane and Golgotha were that for which, above all things, He came. 'He gave His life a ransom for many.' 'He poured out His soul unto death.' He was 'lifted up from the earth.' He 'endured the Cross.' 'That He might sanctify His people with His own blood, He suffered, without the gate.' 'Without shedding of blood was no remission;' 'He loosed us from our sins in His own blood.' He came 'again from the dead, in the blood of the everlasting covenant.' 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!'

Matt. xx. 28; Isai. liii. 12; John xii. 32; Heb. ix. 22, xii. 2, xiii. 20; Rev. i. 5, v. 12

This is what we 'proclaim' at the divine Table. The broken Bread, the poured-out Wine, the *separation* of the one from the other (solemn symbolism of *death*), the occasion of the institution, the words of it, all take us to the Cross. 'All with one

sweet voice proclaim' that Jesus died. All say to each awakened, each seeking, each believing soul, 'He hath given thee rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.'

Yes, every Communion draws afresh the sacred line of atoning blood around all our hopes, all our life. 'We do proclaim the Lord's death.'

3. By the very fact of so doing we proclaim also His glorious present life, His victory over the grave, His spiritual presence with His people, His gift of Himself to be their life indeed. Never, let us be quite sure of this, would the first believers have kept festival over their Master's death, had not that death been followed by a triumph over the grave which at once and for ever showed His dying work to be the supreme achievement which it was. Only the Risen Christ can explain the joy of the Lord's Supper. Without Him it would have been a funeral meal, kept for a while by love in its despair, and then dropped for ever. From the very first till now it has been a feast of life and of thanksgiving. It is a contemporary and immortal witness to the Risen One. And the Risen One is alive for ever more. And in His eternal life He is our life, here and now. Feed on Him as such, feed everywhere and always upon Him. Eat Him and drink Him, that you may live because of Him. Such is the message of the festal Meal of the Church, spoken straight

John vi. 57

from her Lord, to the heart of every member of His Body.

4. '*Till He come.*' As the Supper is our witness to the past of the Finished Work, and to the present of the Risen Life, so it is our infallible prophecy of the coming Glory. It points forward, with its straight and unbroken line of light, into the shadows of the future, and assures us that within those shadows, somewhere, at an hour we think not, lies hidden, lies waiting, the Coming of the Bridegroom, the Return of the beloved Lord to His waiting people. Around that prospect a thousand mysteries gather. But the prospect lies unalterable amidst the mysteries. And the Ordinance is our contemporary and immortal witness to this also. We keep it 'till He come.'

Even so, come, Lord Jesus, adored and longed for! And until Thou comest, hastening down upon
Cant. ii. the mountains of separation, we will, more gladly,
17 more confidently, more expectantly always, 'proclaim Thy death.'

XXXVI

Renewal Day by Day

'The inward man is renewed day by day.'—2 Cor. iv. 16.

THIS is a record of personal experience. St. Paul is describing to his Corinthian converts his own ministerial life, just as it was passing at the time. This was one great aspect of it. His 'outward man,' his physical frame and system, in the wear and tear of the Lord's work, was 'perishing,' decaying; from the bodily point of view he was aging, he was gradually giving way. But from the other side, from the inner side, the opposite process was going on. His 'inward man,' his unseen world of will, affection, thought, under the living power of the Spirit of God, making Christ present in his heart by faith, was 'being renewed,' being made quite fresh and new. It was not only kept going, somehow maintained in some sort of tolerable working order, beating on like an old clock not quite worn out. It was 'being made new'; filled ever afresh with a strong, bright life, quickened with a wonderful youth, from a source, a spring, 'full of immortality.' And this was taking place 'day by day.' It was not a matter of one

great crisis, or of a few such times. He was not lifted intermittently into new life, and then allowed to sink slowly back to spiritual exhaustion, to be animated once again. It was a matter of 'day by day.' He lived a day at a time as regarded the work, the suffering, the battle, and a day at a time as regarded the 'being made new.'

This record of personal experience is a message of universal truth for the Christian believer, now and 'to the end of the age.' Thanks be to God that His messages to us in His Word do thus so often come through personal experience, reaching us not as utterances from the air, but as testimonies carried to us through human hearts, which have beat and have ached like our own. They are divine oracles, sure and certain, the voice of the Eternal Spirit, to be trusted, to be obeyed, in life and death. But they are sent to us, not anyhow, but thus, through the warm and living medium of the experience of men, who have passed them on to us because they have themselves proved them so wonderfully true, and would fain have us also enter into a blessed peace and power in God.

Matt. xxviii. 20

This was the one deep, longing aim of the holy writers, 'that we might have fellowship with them.' We may, if we please, study for their own sake the great characters of such men as Paul and John. But that is the last thing Paul and John ask us to do. They ask us rather to hear what they have

1 John i. 3

to say of their experience of the blessed greatness of Jesus Christ, and then, because He is great, to find great grace in Him, just the same great grace which they found, for ourselves to-day.

Let us sit down then and listen to this message carried to us by St. Paul, that we may 'have fellowship with' him.

1. 'The inward man is *being made new*.' Here is a welcome word for us, in this mortal life of ours. Too often it is as if everything in us and about us were being 'made old.' True, there are 'novelties' always in the air. Fashions, not of dress only, but of almost all aspects of life, are always changing. But the effect upon us of such 'newnesses,' after a time, is anything in the world but a renovating one. Before the man knows it, he is out of date, a survival, moving among 'new faces, other minds.' His 'inward man' is only too conscious of change and of, not renewal, but decay, under the crude novelties of life.

But here comes the Apostle, and tells him a better, a blissful story. It is open to him to carry about within him a secret of perpetual and bright beginnings, a spring-head of waters of immortality, a youth which grows and developes in its capacity to enjoy and do, and yet becomes only the fresher as time goes on; even as the legends say that the angelic life grows always not older, but younger, through the heavenly ages. Here is the possibility of a bright and beautiful permanence in that inner world which

so profoundly affects for us all the seeming of the outer world. It is a permanence which means no mere crystallization of the past, but an expansion of all the treasures of past and present in the light and warmth of a very blessed and a very real future. That future again is not a mere prospect in the distance; it is in living contact with this hour. For it will consist, when it comes, in the eternal enjoyment in glory of Him who is now, in the life of grace, actually 'dwelling in the heart by faith.' Jesus Christ, in the heart and in the hopes, is the sure secret of an inner youth, a youth evermore 'made new.'

2. '*Day by day*.' Delightful closing words of the Apostle's message! Life is built a day at a time. And the Scriptures keep this constantly in view in their promises. 'I am with you all the days'; 'His compassions are new every morning'; 'Be Thou their arm every morning'; 'Renewed day by day.'

Matt. xxviii. 20; Lam. iii. 22, 23; Isai. xxxiii. 2

Christian, tired and somewhat disheartened, take not only life, but the Lord, a day at a time. Forbid your imagination to wander over vague spaces of the pilgrimage. Let the life-time you deal with be just to-day, with its birth when you wake, its maturity in the working hours, and its quiet death when you retire at night to your bed. It is but to-day. And for to-day you possess nothing less than the whole Christ of God; Christ for you, Christ in you, Christ living, loving, keeping, coming. Let Him make you young again to-day.

XXXVII

The Believer's Life after Death

'To-day thou shalt be with Me in the Paradise.'—Luke xxiii. 43.

'We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.'—2 Cor. v. 8 (R.V.).

LET us think a little together, this Lord's Day morning, of two bright aspects of the believer's life after death. That life is, to be sure, a subject on which the Word of God says comparatively little.

'Our knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim.'

And no doubt there is a purpose in this reserve. The Bible is God's oracle not only in what it says, but in the scale on which it says it. Where it has much to tell us, we may be sure that the topic is meant to stand in the very front of our faith. Where its words are few, the topic must be subordinate in our hearts to others which are more important. Yet a subordinate Scripture truth may be, in its proper place, and treated with proper care, a very precious one. And surely this is true of what we gather from the

The Believer's Life after Death

Word about the believer's prospect between death and resurrection.

The two verses before us here both bear quite distinctly upon that prospect. Neither of them can be taken to refer to the full glory of the final state, in which, in resurrection-life, our being will be complete again. 'To-day,' the very day of his painful death, the 'thief' was to be with the Lord in Paradise. And the Apostle was 'of good courage,' as the Revised Version has it, in view of 'absence from the body,' because the other side of that experience was to be this, 'at home with the Lord.'

So here are two precious glimpses into the blessed unseen life in which our holy departed ones are now actually living, and in which, before long, we too look to live, we, 'who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.' Let us take the two views each in turn, for the distinctive truth of each, and then remember the glorious element present in both alike.

1. '*To-day thou shalt be* in the Paradise.' Here first, the dying man is promised the perfect continuance, through death, of his personality. 'To-day thou shalt be.' The sun would set, the mangled and broken body would be thrown into its wretched grave. But the man, the *ego*, would persist beyond it, above it, identical and profoundly living. As little as Jesus was about to be

extinguished by His body's death, so little was the 'thief' about to be by his; this is guaranteed by the voice of Him who was so soon to die, and then to rise again for ever, 'in the power of an endless life.' Let us lay down all *à priori* difficulties about spirit-life at His dear feet; He has given us His personal assurance of the fact of it, and sealed it with His resurrection.

Then, next, we have the promise here that the conscious personality, passing from the body, enters in the name of Christ upon an experience of security, repose, and beauty. '*In the Paradise*,' said the Lord. 'Paradise' is an oriental word, meaning a royal pleasure-ground, a royal park or garden. It calls up ideas accordingly of all that is rich and fair in the way of cultured nature. It suggests to us the loveliness of wood, and lawn, and flowers, and waters, and also of the company which possesses and enjoys the charming scene, the friends, the guests, the family, of the King. They are there for delightful rest, or for delightful exercise. They have come from the battle-field, or the council, or the journey, to walk, to recline, to converse, to listen, where all is beautiful with a large, ordered, stately beauty. And all this is taken up by the Lord Jesus, in His use of the word Paradise, to set forth one side of the believer's unseen life after death. After the manner in which spirits enjoy and spirits see,

the departed Christian 'walks, by sight' (compare 2 Cor. v. 6, 7), in a scene of glorious and restful beauty, in the garden of his King. 'O my dear wife!' said an aged saint, no visionary, in the moment of his departure, putting his hand upon her arm. It was, she said, the very phrase, tone, and action, with which he had once called her attention to a sudden burst of beauty, an 'earthly Paradise,' as they turned a mountain corner in the Highlands.

2. Now, in turn, let the Apostle Paul speak, telling us, in the Holy Ghost, what the prospect is to him, as he contemplates 'absence from the body' in the hour of death. Rendering his words as literally as possible, they are; 'We are deliberately willing *to leave home* in the body and *to get home* to the Lord.' 'To get home'; that is the thought. The heaven beyond death is home. It is not only rest, or refuge; it is nothing less than home. And home is more than a place of safety, or of repose. It is the scene where our whole being is in sweet and vivid harmony with surroundings. It is where affections both rest and expand; everyone and everything there is dear. It is where we are at the same time rocked in the arms of absolutely trusted love, and prepared and refreshed for all the work of life. This precious thing is taken up here as the shadow of that substance which lies just beyond the veil.

To enter the unseen state, Christian, is not to totter out into the cold and void. It is to 'get home.'

3. Lastly, note the divine element common to both prospects. 'Thou shalt be *with Me*'; 'At home *with the Lord*.' After all, it is 'not it, but He.' Jesus is the glory of the immortal Garden. Jesus is the sacred hearth-fire of the immortal Home. Heaven, whether before resurrection or after, is just the bliss of His immediate presence. So heaven is possible for those only to whom His presence is bliss. But oh, for them, what will it not be? The Paradise will be not only a sweet new world of rest and beauty, not a scene only of 'pleasures for evermore,' nor even only a state of blissful and undisturbed intercourse with the blessed ones who have entered in before us. It will be all this, in a degree inconceivable to us now. But all this will be just the circumference round that one possible living and life-giving centre; 'thou shalt be with Me.' The Home will be indeed a circle of blessed fellowship, a place of inconceivable interchange of love and joy among its inhabitants. But the supreme bliss of it, which will always spring up through everything else, and be first in everything, is this—we shall have 'got home to the Lord.'

Psal. xvi. 11

XXXVIII

Our Possessions

'We have.'—Heb. viii. 1.

HERE are two very simple words; in the Greek they are but one. Yet they enfold a wealth of truth and blessing, rightly taken, and rightly used.

In this particular text they take us into the delightful region of fact and possession with regard to our Lord Jesus Christ, in His character and office as our great High Priest, who, having sacrificed Himself as our sin-offering, is now for us upon the throne as our Mediator;—'We have such an High Priest.' But the words recur in many other passages of Scripture, in connexions of inestimable value. As, for example, Heb. vi. 19; 'Which hope *we have*, as an anchor of the soul.' Or again, Eph. i. 7; 'In whom *we have* redemption through His blood, even the remission of sins.' Or again, Eph. ii. 18; 'Through Him *we both have* access in one Spirit unto the Father.' And with such sentences we may of course group such as these, for they are practically identical in phrase—1 Cor. vi. 19; 'Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which *ye have*

of God'; and 2 Cor. vii. 1; '*Having* therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit'; and Heb. x. 19; '*Having* boldness to enter into the Holiest, by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith'; and 1 John v. 12; '*He that hath* the Son *hath* the life.'

What is the message of this class of passages, this rich and beautiful wealth of jewels of the Word, strung on this golden thread, 'we have'? It is that there is a large and all-important place in our Christian life for the use of humble but most positive assertion of our possessions. There is indeed, and must be to the end, ample room for the soul's aspirations and petitions, its search and effort after things yet unattained. But even for these exercises of the spiritual life it is all-important that we, if we are Christians indeed, if we have really come to the Lord in our need, to touch Him, and to live by Him, should never forget the right sort of assertion of the possessions which we have.

If I do not mistake, many a time of secret devotion would immensely gain in power and blessing by more recollection of this. Have we ever been conscious, at such moments, of a certain weariness and disappointment, in the use, perhaps, of a familiar series of earnest petitions? Let us

not give up petitioning; God forbid. Are not some of the very greatest promises which 'we have' linked to the precept 'ask'? But then 'we have' the promises. And often and again our petitioning would proceed with a new and delightful life and expectation if we would lay it aside for a while in order to re-affirm to ourselves what the promises are, and to re-affirm further to ourselves not only that they are, but that 'we have' them. Once at the feet of Jesus, once having touched, with fingers however cold and trembling, the hem of His garment (are not His promises His robe, for our touch by faith?), we have indeed boundless mercies still to ask. But we have at once one supreme mercy to give thanks for, because it is possessed, because 'we have' it. It is the mercy of Himself for us.

Again and again would I press this home, first on my own soul. Take up, in illustration and application, just one of the 'possession' texts quoted above. Look at Eph. i. 7; 'We have the forgiveness of sins.' To ask for forgiveness is, from one point of view, the daily duty of the child of God. 'Forgive us our trespasses,' stands side by side with, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' as the child's petition at the Father's side. But from another point of view, and in order to the truer and surer use of the petition, it is all-important to affirm often to ourselves that '*we have* redemp-

tion through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.' By His most precious sacrifice of peace, by the blood of the Lamb, we, believing, have 'received power to become the sons of God.' John i. 12 And the sons of God, in that blessed inner sense of sonship, (the sense on which, above all others, Scripture delights to dwell,) who are they? Forgiven sinners, welcomed as such to the life and love of a Father's home. Their wonderful forgiveness is embodied in just this, that they are children at home, assured of home-privileges and home-affections. They are transferred from the cour of justice (where they, the guilty, for the sake of the Beloved, have been acquitted) into the palace-home of the grace of God. In that home they are under paternal discipline; they often need paternal forgiveness, and must often ask it. But they are at home, securely there, welcome there beloved there. They are the Lord's redeemed ones, in wonderful fact. 'They have redemption even the forgiveness of sins.' So they are to look in their Father's face, even when they ask their Father's pardon, and to affirm to themselves that, in the deep, antecedent sense, they are forgiven; they are not rebels on trial, but children welcomed home. Will they not ask fatherly pardon in detail with all the deeper tenderness, all the more self-reproach, all the more loyalty of love, because of that wonderful 'we have'?

So we may go round the whole circle of the gems strung upon this thread, 'we have.' Are we wistful and weary over the question of intercourse with God? Are we mourning over intermittent and cold approaches? Let us re-affirm to ourselves our privilege of approach, our *entrée*, free
Eph. iii. and welcome, to His very heart: 'we have access
Heb. x. 12, 19 with confidence'; 'we have entrance into the Holiest.' Are we longing for a fuller flow of the life of the Lord in our life, for a larger power of His Spirit in our spirit? Let us re-affirm the
1 John v. initial fact that, 'having the Son, we have the
1 Cor. vi. 12, 19 life'; 'we have the Holy Ghost from God.' The treasure is here; we have but to get it out, by simple faith, and set it free for use. Are we troubled in any direction, about our souls, our work, our beloved ones? Let us begin every act of petition with that sublimely simple affirmation, 'we have such an High Priest.'

Is there one reader of these words who dares not yet say that he has 'touched the hem'? Yet for you also it is possible to use this talisman, 'we have.' You too 'have' at least one radiant
John vi. 37 promise for your own; 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.'

XXXIX

Living Stones

'To whom coming.'—1 Peter ii. 4.

THESE words stand in a rich and fruitful connexion. St. Peter is showing his disciples some of the great secrets of a growing Christian life. He takes them for granted as alive; therefore he is in earnest that they should grow. He is ambitious for them; he cannot rest in the thought of a stationary or stunted life in them. He must see them grow in personal holiness, grow in love and in strength, grow together in holy fellowship, grow in power to shine for their Lord, winning Him 'glory' from those who watch them, and who see what He has done in them.

Two main thoughts appear in this important part of the Apostle's letter. The believers are to grow by larger use of the 'word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever'; they are to crave for it, and drink it into their young Christian systems, as the milk of life. And they are to grow by perpetual approaches to the Son of God; they are to be always touching Him, always 'keeping touch' with Him, that 'virtue may

1 Pet. i. 23; ii. 2

go out,' always, from Him into them. Just this is what our brief text has to do with. 'To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, ye also, as living stones, are being built up, a spiritual house.'

Here we have the Lord called a Living Stone. We note the phrase in passing; it is pregnant, and it stands alone in the Bible. Often does Scripture call the Lord the Stone, the Rock, setting forth His might, and fixity, and capacity to be at once His people's Foundation to build upon and their Refuge to hide in. Often does it call Him the Life, the Living One, setting Him forth in all His personal and active qualities of grace and love. Here only do the two thoughts beautifully converge, and we have the Stone, the Rock, Living. The wonderful Stone has eyes, and lips, and arms, and heart. It (say rather He) lives to welcome, to embrace, to save, to keep. He lives to make alive.

Then, His disciples are described as so many results or repetitions, in their measure, of Him. 'Ye also, as living stones.' They too are to be, each of them, a stone, sure and stedfast, and living too, with warm and loving life. Individually, each is to be thus strong with His strength, and alive with His life. As a company, they are thus to draw together and cohere, 'being builded' together into 'a house spiritual,' strong with the

strength and living with the life of the Corner-stone. Each in himself, and all together, they are to grow in that strength, and to develope in that wonderful life, till the issue is full of glory.

Bright, deep, pregnant is the imagery. A living stone, a structure of living stones! What blessings may not flow from that ideal realized? What may not the family become, which numbers only one true living stone among its sons or daughters? What may not the congregation become, which contains a genuine nucleus of members, who, not in name only but in deed, are living stones, and are being builded as such together? The Lord of the spiritual House multiply their number in His mercy; it will be a multiplication which must, in His Name, go on and gather ever fresh materials in from the stones as yet dead which lie around the stones that live.

But now, what is the internal secret of the process to be? How am I to be indeed a living stone, fit to be part of such a structure, in respect of both strength and life? The Apostle gives us a divine prescription, equally simple and adequate, in those three words, 'To whom coming.' The absolute requisite for such assimilation to the Living Stone is personal spiritual contact with Him. The absolute requisite for a growth in such assimilation is more such contact, continually

maintained. We, in our weakness and our death, must come to the Lord in the first place, to touch Him and be saved. And then, we must be ever coming, and coming, and coming again, in the sense of perpetual fresh acts of faith in Him, and reception from Him, all along our life.

For observe that the Apostle's language means just this: coming and coming again to Him. In the Greek, 'coming' is expressed not in the past form of the participle, but in the present. It indicates therefore not a coming once done, a completed act, as if it referred only to our initial approach to Him, such as I and perhaps my reader remember, in a definite conversion. It indicates a coming which is always to be done, and done again, a series and process. It points to a use of the Lord which can be illustrated in a measure by our perpetually repeated 'comings' to the vital atmosphere around our bodies, to take in its virtues all the day, breath by breath.

Such, O disciple, longing to get more strength in thy soul, and more love along with the strength, must be thy secret; 'to Him coming.' For renewed applications of His pardoning grace, to Him be coming. For full and happy deliverance from the tyranny of every temptation, to Him be coming. For the perpetually needed patience, purity, self-forgetting serviceableness, to Him be coming. For grace to shine bright

and pure for Christ, to Him be coming. For courage to confess His dear name, for skill and will to labour for Him, for inward rest in life and in death, to Him be always coming. And as you come, and come, remember that great promise, to 'him that cometh unto Me.' There too the words, 'him that cometh,' represent a present participle in the Greek; 'the comer,' the man who comes, and comes, and comes again. And not only the first approach, but all the comings that follow, shall never be in vain; 'I will in no wise cast him out.' John vi. 37.

Charlotte Elliott wrote 'Just as I am' far on in her Christian life. It was the expression of a sudden and profound conviction that to the last, as at the first, this must be the simple secret for all peace, purity, victory, assurance, hope. In that sense let us too take up the immortal hymn always as our own;

'Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.'

XL

Power from On High

'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.'—Acts i. 8.

TWO slight changes may be made in the wording here, to bring it yet nearer to the Greek: 'Ye shall receive power *by the coming of the Holy Ghost upon you;* and ye shall be *my witnesses.*' Thus read, the sacred promise seems to present two additional points of truth. First, the 'reception of power' is practically identified with the 'coming upon you of the Holy Ghost'; it is not merely its sequel, it is its other side. Then, the 'witnesses' are not only, as of course they are, 'unto Me'; they are also 'mine.' They belong to Him to whom they testify. They testify because they belong. They belong that they may testify.

This is the final promise spoken by the Lord Jesus while He yet trod our earth. Another moment, and He was ascending the skies. Truly it is a sacred 'last word,' meant to be dear to the disciple's heart as well as binding on his faith.

To whom was it spoken? Immediately, to the Eleven. But the after-story of the Acts assures us

that through them it was meant for all believers. For in the primitive Christian Church we find all the disciples living as the Lord's witnesses, and we see them all receiving the power and fulness of the Spirit. '*Be ye filled with the Spirit*' is just as general a precept as, 'Be not drunk with wine.' '*Shew forth the praises of Him* who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light,' is just as general a precept as, 'Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.'

Eph. v. 18

1 Peter ii. 9

So to you, dear friend and reader, and to me, as truly as to John and to Peter upon Olivet so long ago, the Lord says, 'You shall be my witnesses.' We are all called to be good evidence for Jesus. It is our object of existence, as Christians, to be valid proof that Jesus Christ the Lord is real, is good, is the supreme Blessing, is Saviour, is God. By word, surely, where God gives us opportunity, and always by life, we are meant to be this. We are saved—to witness. True, His love rests really upon *us*; the saved one is personally dear to Him beyond all words. But out from that centre He wills to radiate the light of His love all around. We are loved—to witness, to be witnesses unto Him, to be His witnesses.

Let us be covetous to live that life. Away with a 'religion' which *terminates* in the precious gift of personal salvation. Our call is to leave behind

us, aye, to shed now around us, some solid evidence for Him who bought us, who joined us to Himself, on purpose that we might help in the expression of His grace and glory to this dark world.

But now, 'how shall this thing be?' The Lord implies that it is something wonderful for a sinful man to be one of His witnesses. For He tells us that we need to receive a supernatural Power that we may be so. But then, He tells us that that blessed Power is provided, is accessible, may be received by every true disciple, and that so this wonderful life may be lived by us indeed.

How can it be? 'By the coming of the Holy Ghost upon you.' By the blessed gift of Pentecost, shed forth from the exalted Saviour. Without it (nay, rather without Him, for the Gift is an Eternal Person) we cannot really live the witness-life. But with Him, we can. The thing desired is a life whose conduct and whose testimony shall be such that God can use them for the divine end of glorifying Christ to men. That life cannot be lived on our own resources. But it can be lived in the gracious fulness of the Spirit.

What shall we do in view of such certainties? We will 'ask, that we may have.' We will take a great promise with us, and, as it were, kneel down on it, as the Mahometan kneels down on his prayer-carpet. We will spread under our knees that word, 'your Heavenly Father shall give His

Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.' And then, we will 'ask Him,' looking, not at our faith, but at the promise. Luke xi. 13

As we ask, or ere we ask, we will see that our motive is true. *Why* do we seek the Spirit's special power? Is it to lift *us* to a religious pedestal? Is it that '*my* work,' '*my* influence,' '*my* character,' may be talked about? Take heed. Those thoughts go very near the sin of Simon Magus, who would fain receive the wonder-power of the Spirit that he might, more than ever, be thought 'some great one.' Let our one motive be that somehow, through the little lens of our life and word, Jesus may be 'great' to hearts around us, while the lens is invisible (as it should be) to those who see through it. Yes, with a humble, simple motive we will kneel down on our 'carpet,' and ask the fulness of the gift of God. And we will not doubt that, so asked, He 'giveth, and upbraideth not.' The answer may be a crisis, or it may be a process. But it is sure. Acts viii. 18, 19

How shall we evidence our possession of the sacred 'power'? In many ways. For one way, in a great 'growth downward,' in our own eyes. The fulness of blessing tends naturally to this. St. Peter, before Pentecost, had a strong element of self-assertion in his character. After Pentecost, who ever saw a trace of it? He was everyone's brother and helper, loving to sympathize and serve,

Acts viii. Acts ix., x. ready to be sent, or to be sent for, just as he was wanted.

The man 'endued with power from on high' will show it in a strong dominion over self. He Jas. iii. 17 will be 'sweet at home'; 'gentle, easy to be entreated,' watchful not to 'stumble' others, meek and lowly, loyal to every little duty; a *winning* character.

Above all, the evidence, both to himself and to others, will lie in this, that 'Christ is all the world to him.' The blessed Spirit 'takes of the things *of Christ*, and shows them.' The man who has the Spirit fully on him will have Christ fully Eph. iii. 17 in him, 'dwelling in his heart, by faith.' Where He so dwells, He will look out of the window, He will speak from the door. It is the life in which Jesus 'cannot be hid' that is the true witness-life for Him, in the power of the Holy Ghost.

XLI

Fear and Cheer

'The night following the Lord stood by him, and said unto him, Be of good cheer, Paul.'—Acts xxiii. 11.

VERY memorable and instructive is the *setting* of those last five words (only two words in the Greek). They are the utterance of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, direct to His servant. Paul was indeed leading the witness-life of which we thought last Sunday. And here comes the Lord to give him His own gracious encouragement in the midst of it: 'Thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem; so must thou bear witness also at Rome.' Delightful words are these to study. They remind us that while Paul was speaking on the stairs, Jesus was listening. Every word the servant said about his old unconverted life, and about his conversion, and all his Master's mercies to him, was overheard by the Master. The Master loved the witnessing servant, and came the next night to tell him so, and to cheer him on his way. So it is still, in the deep spiritual reality of it. Our poor unworthy words about Him, unworthy, yet spoken because we love Him, are

Acts xxi. 40

overheard; Jesus is listening. Our sadly imperfect aim and labour to live to Him, to 'witness' to Him in a life transformed by His Holy Spirit, is recognized by Him. He loves it, with His most generous love. It is not now His wont to pay us visits which are also visions; yet He has His own way of giving us the joy and power of His spiritual Presence, saying to our inner man, 'Be of good cheer; thou shalt witness yet for Me.'

But not only are these words memorable; their *setting* is full of divine instruction. 'The night following.' What night was it? It was the sequel to a very stormy day of St Paul's life, and it was succeeded by a day of more silent but still more deadly peril. The day before, his frail body
ver. 10 had been nearly 'pulled in pieces' by the angry Pharisees and Sadducees in the council; only the prompt action of the Roman commandant had
ver. 12 saved him. And 'as soon as it was day,' next morning, 'more than forty' fanatics bound themselves by oath to assassinate him; with excellent prospects of success. Was it not a dark setting? Could any moment have been much more helpless and hopeless, in a life already wearing out with toils and sufferings? Look at this man. He is imprisoned deep in the recesses of the huge Antonia, the great Roman keep which dominated the temple-courts. He has just escaped, with difficulty, from a wild personal outrage. His life

is about to be attempted by a large gang of the most dangerous people in the world, religious fanatics, thinking they serve God by murder.

Just then and just there, 'the Lord stood by him.' St. Luke, in his majestic simplicity, makes no allusion to the *arrival* of the Lord. No, He simply *was there*, 'standing by him.' Massive walls, iron bolts, disciplined sentinels—what were they to bar out the King? Wild tumults of the Sanhedrin, merciless plots of the wretched zealots out of doors—what were they to the royal feet of Jesus, as He stepped over them all, and 'stood by' the desolate, exhausted man who had confessed Him, and said, 'Be of good cheer'?

To Him circumstances are *nothing*, even when the circumstances mean the dungeon, and the power of Rome, and the hatred of the Jews. Jesus transcends all, and 'stands by him,' omnipotent to love, to bless, to keep. 2 Tim. iv. 17

Is there not an abiding parable of promise in this scene? It is not alone in Scripture. A close and glorious parallel is that of John xx., where, 'when the doors were shut, for fear of the Jews,' and the little company knew not what fierce violence might at any moment burst them in, 'Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, Peace be unto you,' and 'showed them His hands and His side.' 'Glad' indeed they were, as St John tells us, 'when they ver. 19 ver. 20

saw the Lord.' And glad assuredly was Paul, when *he* saw the Lord. For the sight was not only the Lord, but the Lord *there*. It was His ineffable Presence in the very midst of awfully adverse circumstances. It was visible proof that not only was He Lord of His servant, but supreme Sovereign of all that could seem most adverse to
Phil. iii. 21 His servant, and most dreadful; 'subduing all things to Himself.'

Thus the scene becomes a parable of promise. It speaks to the believer now, as it has spoken to all believers, ever since that 'night following.' It places before us not only a Christ Jesus
Cant. v. 16; Isa. lxiii. 1 'altogether lovely,' but indeed also 'mighty to save,' immeasurably independent of all that appears to crush His people. Do their circumstances find any parable in the walls of Antonia, or in the rage and craft of the unhappy Jews? Are their circumstances actually akin to St. Paul's, awful dangers, sickening fears, perhaps in some dangerous point of the heathen or Mahometan mission-field? Are they circumstances outwardly less dark, but inwardly dreadful to the spirit, in which, whether for himself or others, the Christian is
Mark xiv. 33 'sore amazed and very heavy,' and knows not what to do? Is it anything, known in its bitterness, to the secret heart, which walls life in as with a prison, or seems to attack its love and hopes as with a dagger? Oh remember 'the

night following,' that dark and menacing night, when everything, humanly speaking, was a symbol of despair to a very, very weary and sensitive man, exquisitely susceptible of fear and care. The Lord was there then. The Lord transcended circumstances then. The Lord loved His servant then, and was omnipotent for him, as well as kind. He is the same to-day, He is the same to-night.

XLII

Steadfastness and Sympathy

'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith; knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren which are in the world.'—1 Peter v. 9.

HERE again, as a fortnight ago, let us make a few changes in the translation. Then we may the better ponder some precious treasures in the message.

'Whom resist, solid in your faith; knowing that the same aspects' (literally the same *things*) 'of these afflictions are being carried to their goal for' (in the case of) 'your brotherhood in the world.'

This rendering, which borders on a paraphrase, accentuates some important matters in the text. 'Solid' gives us the thought of 'steadfastness' and *something more*. It presents to us the believer, and the believing company, as not only rooted to one position but internally sound and true. No 'hollowness reverts' to the enemy's assault; their heart is fixed, 'trusting in the Lord,' with a trust real to its depths. Again, 'in *your* faith,' is, in my opinion, a safer rendering than the more literal one, 'in *the* faith.' For in the general

usage of the Apostles the word *pistis* ('faith') very rarely, if ever, means *the* 'faith,' in the sense of a creed of sacred truth. It habitually means 'faith,' in the sense of the personal reliance with which man rests upon God in His promises. Thus we get here the precious message that we, if we would be 'solid' against the Adversary, ver. 8 who means our utter and eternal ruin, must be so, very simply, 'by faith.' To be rock-like, we must lean upon the Rock. To be 'solid' to the very heart, we must have Christ 'dwelling in the heart, *by faith*.' It is the old story. Salvation, in all its stages, is by faith. And what, practically, is saving faith? It is—a trusted Christ.

Then further, our new translation brings out a certain delicacy of phrase as to the 'sameness' of the afflictions of believers. St. Peter does not say simply 'the same afflictions.' He says, precisely, 'The same things of the afflictions.' This gives us a message very helpful to the troubled heart. We may feel, perhaps quite rightly, 'This affliction of mine, in many details, is unique. There cannot be a precise parallel to it in other cases.' True indeed, if we insist upon a bare likeness of events or conditions in detail. But St. Peter leads us rather to see the 'sameness' in 'the things of the afflictions.' He refers to types, and classes, and aspects. He reminds us that somewhere or

other in the 'brotherhood in the world' there is a Christian who is enduring, and blessedly enduring, not an identical trouble, but a similar *type* of trouble. There is enough sameness thus to tell you that He who is enabling your unknown fellow-pilgrim to 'count it all joy,' to say, 'It is not worthy to compare with the glory to be revealed in us,' nay, 'It worketh out a weight of glory,' can enable you to say the same.

Jas. i. 2; Rom. viii. 18; 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Again, our new translation brings out the truth that these 'afflictions' are not merely 'being accomplished,' getting to their close, soon to be over. The Greek word gives us the richer and stronger thought that they are being '*carried to their goal*,' by Him who not only permits but overrules. The Lord is leading them up to a result. He is manipulating them for the highest final blessing of His 'afflicted' saints. It is not only a *succession*; first 'the cross,' then 'the crown.' It is a profound *connexion*. The crown is the goal of the process of the cross, the issue of the discipline of trial. '*Les croix sont les marteaux pour forger la couronne.*' 'Crosses are hammers for forging the crown.' They have everything to do with the crown's adjustment for just *that* brow!

This is no contradiction to the truth of free grace. As to merit, as to title, all is mere and wonderful mercy, the gift of God, the purchase of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of Calvary, for His

people. But as for capacity to receive and to enjoy, it is a matter of discipline, of training, of processes 'carried to their goal,' by the Hand, strong and patient, which makes no mistakes.

Then, lastly, this is being done 'for your brotherhood in the world.' That thought is all-important for us in getting the full blessing of this message. Think what it is meant to do for the afflicted believer's soul. First, it is to carry him out, a very long way out, of himself, even all over the world. In soul, he is to circumnavigate the globe, to penetrate its continents, to visit innumerable hearts and homes, with the thought, 'This is my world-wide brotherhood.' Under a million differences of place, scene, history, language, character, there is this wonderful oneness; these believers in Jesus are all brothers and sisters; they are 'the brotherhood.' The troubled heart may reap a sweet blessing from the mere act of that excursion. It will breathe a grand open air. It will go out in love to the countless 'brethren,' each with his burthen and his staff. In that measure, it will forget itself, and rest. But then, from the excursion it will delightfully come home, revived and strong. With new courage it will take up its own share of 'the afflictions' again. Things at home will be seen under a nobler, happier, holier light for that sight of the kindred 'things

Gal. iii. 28 of others,' the others who yet are 'one, in Christ Jesus.'

It is Sunday morning. The glory of the Sabbath sun, zone after zone, is stealing round the world. Let us 'take the wings of the morning,' and visit specially to-day 'the brotherhood in the world.' In love, in spirit, let us see the faces, and hear the voices, and watch 'the types of afflictions carried to their goal.' Our own Sabbath will be all the brighter, and it will last us all the week.

XLIII

Like a Weaned Child

'Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother.'—Psalm cxxxi. 2 (R.V.).

THIS little 'Psalm of Degrees,' or 'of Ascents,' is one of the sweetest and tenderest utterances of faith in the whole Old Testament. From the first of its few words to the last it is the voice of the child of God, deep at rest in the Father's mother-like arms, and only looking outward to say to others, to Israel, just at the end, 'hope in the Lord.' As if the thought were, 'Here am I, in the place of peace; it is a good place; the peace passeth understanding; dear brethren, dear fellow-pilgrim, you cannot too simply, nor too long, trust the Giver of that peace.'

Let us look a little closer at this happy witness to the deep and blissful content to be found within the mighty hands of God. This possessor of repose indicates to us, in a very instructive way, certain conditions of that repose, which have suggestions of their own for us, full at once of heart-searching and of love. We observe at once an allusion to a state which has preceded the

present sacred happiness; 'I have stilled and quieted my soul.' So the soul, with its consciousness, its emotions, its depths and currents of feeling, had *needed* stilling and quieting. It had been in agitation. A storm had swept it, with a tumult, with strong crying. The present calm had come on by way of a contrast; in some wonderful way, the unrest had heard a voice saying, 'Peace, be still,' and had obeyed. The quiet was quiet heightened by the reminiscence of distress.

Still further, we find an indication of the kind of disturbance which had come—and gone. This is given us in that exquisitely tender simile, 'like a weaned child.' The trouble of the weaned child is the trouble of a deprivation; the loss, the unexplained loss, for it is too young to understand explanations, of the sacred sustenance of its newborn life. It is the pain and grief of '*having to do without.*' And the stillness and the quiet, the silent rest, 'the low beginnings of content,' are the results and symptoms of '*learning to do without.*'

Here is a simple but very fruitful lesson for thee and for me, Christian reader. Very various are life's troubles; but a large class under that large variety comes to just this, the troubles occasioned by 'having to do without.' They meet us everywhere. They range from the lightest, the smallest, to the deepest and most dark. Quite possibly your example of the species just now may be a thing

in itself very small. It may be the call to do without some innocent pleasure of the hour, an eagerly expected but frustrated holiday, or interview, or visit, or the like. It may be some looked-for letter which the postman will not bring. It may be the school-boy's, or school-girl's, missing of the prize; a pain to parents as well as child.

But then it may be something very much graver, in kind and in results. Perhaps you have to 'do without' health. Some mischief of our mortality has touched you, and you cannot get well. The spring and buoyancy of life are gone, and there has come to you, perhaps, in the place of them, the presence of a stern incessant pain, or, what some sufferers know to be even worse, an incessant exhaustion, a chronic inward failure. It seems but yesterday that your step was strong, and your spirits young; to-day you have, for the season at least, to 'do without.'

Perhaps you have to 'do without' scenes and surroundings so dear that they seemed to be part of your heart. Your old landscape is in sight no more. If you went now to the familiar and beloved door, you would have to ring the bell

> 'Children not thine have trod my nursery floor,'

says the orphan poet to 'his Mother's Picture'; realizing afresh what it is to have to 'do without' the dear scenes which cradled life in their love and beauty.

Aye, and for William Cowper, it was not the nursery, after all, but the mother that it was so hard to have to 'do without.' His immortal Elegy over that precious portrait does but put into perfect words the unutterable sighs of numberless hearts which have tasted deep of bereavement. You know all about it, you, dear orphan child, and you, childless parent, and you, widowed wife or husband in your desolation, and you, O friend, to whom the world can never be the same since you have had to 'do without' that 'half of your soul in the other body.' Already upon you all has come the skirt of the great shadow, or rather, perhaps, the heaviest folds of it are wrapt about your heads. You are called to a sore and heavy experience of this mysterious 'weaning,' this having to 'do without.'

Beloved friends, experienced in loss, may I point you, with a sort of silence, (for print is very quiet,) to the loss-stricken Psalmist's testimony? Do we not gather that he had just been called to some mysterious trial, akin to yours, and was just learning to be quiet about it, not to 'exercise himself in great matters,' seeking to look behind the holy will of God, and to understand it all before the time? He was just getting a glimpse of the secret blessedness to be found, under certain divine conditions, in 'learning to do without.' He was tasting a strange sweetness in the cup of grief. Falling back quite simply on a Father's

love in the unexplained sorrow, he found himself, he knew not how, getting to rest; not to sleep, but to rest; a rest out of which he could say to others, like one who had *a right* to say it, 'O Israel, hope in the Lord.'

One little touch of suggestion tells us where the secret of the blessed change was to be found. He compares his soul to a child weaned, not '*from*,' but 'WITH his mother.' The loss is there. The joy is taken away, and he must do without it. But the *parent* is there, more profoundly, more fondly, loving than ever. And that is a guarantee that ultimate happiness lies deep within the sorrow; nay, it has begun already, in the simple consciousness of the beloved presence. And even so it is with the 'weaned' mourners and their God. 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' Isai. lxvi. 13

XLIV

City and Paradise in One

'In the midst of the street of the city . . . was there the tree of life.'—Rev. xxii. 2.

LET us look upward this Lord's Day, even as we did on one of our September Sundays, and by faith, in the light of Scripture, 'behold the glory to be revealed.' It is both sweet and serviceable, in our Sabbath hours on earth, to ponder the revealed conditions of that long and happy Sabbath-keeping which awaits us, when we shall rest for ever from all sin, and all sorrow, and all distress and failure in our service, and from all that is unworthy in our worship, but shall never rest from the delight of serving, and from the solemn joy of worshipping.

So we look through the telescope of this text to-day, and take an observation of the heavenly life. Behold it, as the Seer sets it before us. It is a double glory. It is a life lived in a City. It is a life lived in a Garden. And the two radiant aspects are blended wonderfully into one.

1. The heavenly life is a life lived in a City. The Bible closes with the gorgeous vision of a

city, 'God's great town in the unknown land.' Here and there, all along the pages of the divine Book, intimations and preparations for this have appeared. In the Psalms and in the Prophets we have words spoken about 'the city of the Lord,' which surely transcend in their tone and phrase the mere earthly Jerusalem, and point to an eternal object, a Jerusalem whose walls and bulwarks are salvation, and whose gates are praise. Then come the Apostles, and they tell the believer that he is 'fellow-citizen with the saints'; that his 'city-home is in the heavens'; (so I would render Phil. iii. 20); that already, in spirit, he has 'come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'; that his Lord will hereafter 'write upon him the name' of that fair place, making him to be, legibly and actually, all that a citizen of the blessed Zion in idea is. So we ascend step by step to the final scene. It opens, and we see 'that great city,' 'the Bride, the Lamb's wife,' with the gem-foundations, and the street of crystal gold, and the gates of pearl. Therein is no night, nor tears, nor pain, nor anything that defileth, nor one place more sacred than another; 'I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.' The eternal Presence makes it all one sanctuary.

Psalm lxxxvii.; Isa. xxxiii. 20; &c.

Eph. ii. 19

Heb. xii. 22

Rev. iii. 12

Rev. xxi. 22

None the less it is *a City*, vast and populous.

xxi. 24 Its inhabitants are 'nations.' It overflows with human life, life glorified and immortal, but none the less human life. All of good which we associate with the thought of a city has there its fulness and its work. It is a scene of supreme
xxii. 3 organized order; '*the throne* of God and of the Lamb is in it'; all the innumerable circles of the multifold society move in perfect regulation and harmony around that blessed Centre. It is a capital point, where are concentrated together all the splendours, all the dignities, which associate themselves with the idea of a city which is not only great in scale but metropolitan in position. Who does not know the indefinable distinction which attaches to *the* city of a country, the place which is the seat of government, the summit of society, the natural headquarters of thought and action? This 'great city, the holy Jerusalem,' is 'the city of the great King.' It
xxii. 3, 5 is also a city of kings; 'His servants shall serve Him, and they *shall reign* for ever and ever.' We know little as yet of the arena and the conditions of those kingships under the King Eternal. But may we not be sure that the citizen-kings of heaven will have real and far-extended functions to
Luke xix. 17 exercise in their eternal service? 'Have thou authority over ten cities.'

So the great vision sets the civic aspect of glory before us. To be sure, it does so in symbol,

in hieroglyphic; we are not to press the gems and gold into literal interpretations. None the less, the things signified by those hieroglyphics are signified truly. They are what they are indicated to be. The life of Heaven *is a city life*, a scene and state in which human beings in numbers numberless live, converse, co-operate, govern and are governed, and experience all the countless influences which members of a community exercise on one another, and always under the blissful conditions of the absence of sin, decay, and death. That civic life has assuredly its events, its history. It has its infinitely varying experiences of love and tenderness. It unites its members, all of them individual for ever, in the common joy and work of the service of their King.

2. Meanwhile, the life which on one side is a City, on the other side is a Paradise. Compare Rev. xxii. 2 with Rev. ii. 7. 'The tree of life,' says the Lord to the angel of Ephesus, is 'in the midst of the paradise of God.' 'The tree of life,' says the Apostle in this last vision, is 'in the midst of the street of the city, and on either side of the river'; '*the tree*,' that is, in this place, no doubt (by a Hebrew usage), '*the trees*,' the bowers and avenues of trees all belonging to the one celestial sort.

We need not dwell on this aspect of the picture; our previous meditation on the Intermediate State

makes this unnecessary. But we may at least remember that we have here a beautiful symbol of the assurance that out of that holy city and its life will be for ever banished all that defaces and defiles the cities of time. No deformity shall mar the scene; there shall be no purlieus of want and vice. The life, with all its metropolitan dignity, order, and force, shall be for ever pure, sweet, and beautiful, with the fruit and the foliage of the Paradise in which God shall walk with men.

XLV

The Spirit against the Flesh

'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.'—Gal. v. 17.

HERE is a message full of divine encouragement. It can prove a perfect mine of treasure to the heart of the believer, conscious of spiritual conflict, and longing for a victory which shall be victory indeed. It is no fiction, but a bright and strong experience, that this short utterance can even make a spiritual crisis, and send the Christian on his way with a lasting accession of conscious peace and power.

But is it so indeed? Quite possibly the reader asks the question with a genuine sense of surprise and doubt. Surely this text is precisely one of the Scriptures which speak most distinctly of a conflict in the soul. Scarcely does Rom. vii. lead us more directly than this short verse to the consideration of the presence of discordant elements, or conditions, in the life of the regenerate man. Is it not a witness to the fact that 'the flesh' is present always in the disciple, be he who he may, be he the oldest and most experienced of saints? And

is not 'the flesh,' in the inspired vocabulary of St. Paul, no mere synonym for the body, as if it meant merely that in us which feels fatigue, and decay, and death? Is it not that aspect or element
Rom. viii. of our being 'which is not subject to the law of
7 God, neither indeed can be'? Is it not well said that its best popular equivalent is the word 'self'? And, if so, is not the passage good Scriptural evidence that the Christian is deluded if he ever allows himself to say, 'I have come to the end of myself'? Does it not warn him that he must reckon with the presence of that peril, 'self,' even to the end of his chapter here on earth, yea, till he
Rom. viii. 'receives the adoption, to wit, the redemption of
23 his body'? As surely as world and devil have to be treated, to the last, as present enemies, must we not so treat 'the flesh' as well?

It is so. To every one of these successive questions, in all conviction and solemnity, we answer, Yes. The Apostle's words are clear in their reference. He is writing to regenerate believers as such, to Christians as Christians. He gives not one hint that he is viewing them here as in a lower stage of divine endowment than need be. And he bids them all remember, as a factor in their spiritual condition, that 'the flesh lusteth,' desireth, liketh, tendeth, 'against the Spirit.'

But, then, another aspect of the passage has to be remembered. We first note that it contains

also the words, 'the Spirit lusteth against the flesh.' We have next to note that this is the main, leading, ruling assertion; it is on this, not on the other and opposite side of things, that St. Paul lays stress. The whole context proves this; for the Apostle's obvious purpose all through it is to bring his readers into the secret of a life of liberty and holiness. 'Walk in the Spirit,' he has ver. 16. just written, 'and the lusts of the flesh you shall not fulfil'; and he couches that last promise, in the Greek, in a specially energetic form; 'you shall not fulfil them, *you shall not indeed*,' would be a fair paraphrase. Then, lastly, we take careful notice that 'the Spirit' here is not the spirit of man, but the Spirit of God dwelling in the believing disciple. This is abundantly clear again from the context. You have but to read from verse 16 to the end of the chapter and you will see that it is the Holy Ghost who is in view throughout. Compare verse 18 with Rom. viii. 14: 'If ye be *led of the Spirit*, ye are not under the law'; 'As many as are *led by the Spirit of God*, they are the sons of God.'

Now therefore, is there not ground for saying that in this utterance upon the flesh and the Spirit, we have 'everlasting comfort and good hope through grace'? Here is no mere affirmation that there must be a conflict. Here is rather a grand assurance that with, and in, the true Christian, resides the secret

which can transform that conflict into a continuous victory, and more than victory.

Is 'the flesh' present with you, and is it a strong enemy? Yes. But it is equally true that the Holy Spirit is present with you, yea, dwelling within you, and He (not it, but He) is an almighty Friend, 'stronger than the strong.' Does 'the flesh' lust against the Spirit? Yes. But then, with all His divine antagonism to evil, the Spirit, dwelling in you, 'lusteth against the flesh.' His eternal 'tendency,' personal and intense, is 'against the flesh.' What chameleon aspect is 'the flesh' in *you* taking? Is it felt as vanity, as pride, as defiled desire, as wrath and jealousy, as untruthfulness, unfaithfulness, unkindness? Is it masked as sloth, as greed, as anything which contradicts the life of love and the life of temperance in Christ? Remember, against all and several of these iniquities, 'the Spirit lusteth.' And He is in you, templed in your being, the gift of God in Christ, divinely set in profound contact with you. You need not *ask* Him to 'lust against' your sin; He does so, as only the Lord can do. But you can, calling upon God, open your spirit to the eternal Spirit, place yourself, as it were, deliberately and consciously in the path of that mighty 'tendency,' give yourself to be borne along in sympathy with Him. And so He in you, and you in Him, shall be conqueror

indeed. A force not your own shall lift you into a lasting victory, with your foot upon the foe. Led by the Spirit, you shall 'mortify the deeds of the body,' and 'walk at liberty, keeping His commandments.'

Rom. viii. 13; Psal. cxix. 45

XLVI

As for Me

'As for me.'—Joshua xxiv. 15.

THIS short phrase occurs again and again in Scripture. 'As for me, I' (unlike the enemies of God) 'will come into Thine house, in the multitude of Thy mercies.' 'As for me, I' (unlike those whose portion is in this life) 'will behold Thy face in righteousness.' We might add to such quotation many others where the same or similar Hebrew occurs, but is otherwise rendered in our Version. Such a passage is Psalm lxxiii. 28, where we may read, 'As for me, nearness to God for me is good.' Others may, if they will, go wandering from Him, devoting themselves to the world, to self, to sin, as their life and choice. My preference and resolve are otherwise. 'Nearness to God for me is good.'

Psal. v. 7
Psal. xvii. 15

The phrase thus tends to put before us a certain contrast and separation. The speaker places himself, in some respects, aside and apart. He looks around him, and sees other men following this or that line of thought and

action. Their numbers are large. Their action, their spirit and sentiment, have all the weight and force of a fashion, perhaps of a well-nigh universal fashion. He cannot help it. He must take another line. However singular he may make himself, so must it be. 'As for me,' I will serve the Lord; I will come into His house; I will behold His face; I will keep close to Him.

It was precisely in this spirit, we remember, that Joshua spoke the 'as for me' which stands at the head of this chapter. There, at Shechem, the old leader of Israel sate, in the quiet power of faith, looking the nation in the face. He put before them the problems of loyalty to Jehovah, and of the obligations of that loyalty. He challenged them to a choice, which choice must be their own; not even Joshua could make it for them. Would they be the true worshippers and vassals of the Lord? Or would they prefer the service of Baal, or of Chemosh? 'Choose you this day whom you will serve.' Quite conceivably they might waver in their choice, even then, as all too certainly and sadly they not only wavered but broke away from their Redeemer in the next generations, till in Gideon's youth we find that, in Ophrah anywise, it was a capital crime to deny Baal! But whatever the nation of Israel might do, Joshua's choice was made. 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'

ver. 15

Judges vi. 30

Those words have had a long and active life. Not only are they enshrined imperishably in the Book of God: they are frequently to be seen as a watchword in our modern homes, amidst the stir and movement of our life to-day, inscribed perhaps on card or tablet, and hung where the visitor cannot help seeing them, in an entrance hall, in a dining-room, or where not: 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' The way of the world may run otherwise, and my choice may be out of the mode altogether. It does not matter; this is my choice; 'we will serve the Lord.' Happy the house where that motto is realized in the household life. And happy the heart and character where it lies deep at the springs of individual thought and action, every day.

Need we remind ourselves what 'as for me' should *not* mean? Never for a moment is the Christian called to isolation, peculiarity, opposition, *for their own sake*. 'Let every one of us *please his neighbour*, for his good, unto edification.' It is the believer's business to be the most considerate, sympathetic, courteous, and companionable of people, within the lines of the will of God. Let this be well remembered, with reflection, and sanctified good sense, and prayer. Otherwise, we may be merely disagreeable, and mistake this for fidelity to principle.

Rom. xv. [2]

We may be justly avoided for our own sakes, and think that this is 'bearing the reproach of Christ,' and 'going forth to Him without the gate.' Heb. xiii. 13

But when all this is said, how great and sacred is the place in our hearts and wills which must be kept for 'as for me!' Considerateness and sympathy are as different as possible from drift and compromise. They should be, and often are, most conspicuous in lives which are all the while governed absolutely by personal surrender to the will of God, such surrender as can lay quietly down at His feet all that is most cherished in reputation and ease, when it comes to a real alternative between Him and the world. By His grace, let us write such an 'as for me' large and legible upon our hearts. Let fashions of thought and practice go as they will. Let a whole society, a whole period, drift into indifference to His Word, His Worship, His Day. Let even those who bear His name ignore His express commands as to common duty, personal self-discipline of habits, careless use of the tongue, and such-like things. Let it be out of fashion in even well-meaning circles to witness definitely for Christ, to seek the genuine conversion of souls, to labour for the extension of the Gospel kingdom. 'As for me,' it must be otherwise. Without the least trumpet-flourish, I must take another line. I am not my brethren's judge. But I am my Master's servant.

XLVII

Notwithstanding, the Lord

'Notwithstanding, the Lord.'—2 TIM. iv. 17.

THESE words are broken out of the record of the last known incident in the life of St. Paul. He is writing to his dear Timotheus, from the Roman dungeon which was now soon to give him up to execution. He has much to say, of the Church, the Gospel, the eternal life, and also of the sorrows of the human heart. The criticism, ponderous yet shallow, which can question the Pauline genuineness of this Epistle, has first to ignore the fact that the pages come to us almost wet with the tears of a loving soul, pierced to its depths by grief; and such matters did not lie much in the line of fabrications in the second century.

But now, last among these many things, Paul lets in the light upon his trial at the Roman bar. We gather that the letter was dated between two stages of the process. There had been a 'first answer,' and then came a *comperindinatio*, an adjournment before the next. Of that second 'answer' we know nothing now, except through the eloquence of the grave. But of this first we

2 Tim. iv. 16

know that it was seized by the accused as an occasion for one more proclamation of his Lord, so delivered that all the hall could hear. 'By me the preaching was fully known, so that all the Gentiles heard.' 2 Tim. iv. 17.

Would that we were told how he there struck the theme of Christ, and developed its glory! Never at Athens, surely, or Cæsarea, or Jerusalem, was Paul more magnificently himself. But he had to act against tremendous odds; 'no man stood by me; all men forsook me; I pray God it may not be laid to their charge.' No, in the terror of that time, when to be a Christian was to pass for atheist and anarchist, no one cared to hold a brief for this leader of the abominated sect, and he had to plead alone. Ah, but not alone. Then, yet once more, he tells us, the Presence came, and overshadowed him. 'Notwithstanding, the Lord stood by me'; 'notwithstanding, the Lord.'

The great martyr's experience has repeated itself in all the ages. For the Person who caused it is the same yesterday and also, blessed be His name, to-day. Just lately a missionary friend, from the remote west of China, was recounting to me the last scenes of the massacres of 1900 in Shan-si, in China. There a whole family, Mr and Mrs Pigott, and their dear children, dragged to the provincial capital, were led out one after another in public, and slain with the sword.

To the last, on the road and in the city, Mr Pigott 'made the preaching known,' to the unfeigned amazement of 'the Gentiles.' 'What, will you say this now, when you will die for saying it to-morrow?' But his secret was that of St. Paul; 'Notwithstanding, the Lord.'

In that same lurid summer a missionary lady, Mrs Atwater, loving her work, her neighbours, her scholars, her husband, happy in her noble calling, found herself confronted with death. She wrote fragmentary letters, one by one, and gave them to native friends, who, after her martyrdom, got them to the coast. Some sentences in those letters may well be inscribed as margins to the text of the Apostle: 'I am preparing for the end, very quietly and calmly. The Lord is wonderfully near, and He will not fail me. I was restless and excited when there seemed a chance of life, but God has taken away that feeling. The pain will soon be over, and O the sweetness of the welcome above! I cannot imagine the Saviour's welcome.'

'No man stood with them; notwithstanding, the Lord.'

It is well for us thus to recollect that the ancient victories of faith repeat themselves to-day. Our Christian life is in many respects so traditionally easy that it is in grave risk of becoming merely perfunctory. And at the heart of a perfunctory religion there sets in, only too often, the mortifica-

tion of unbelief. But then comes across our view some glorious example of sacrifice, of suffering, in the Lord's name, bearing His inimitable impress. And it tells us, among other things, that supreme thing, that HE liveth. '*Son culte se rajeunira sans cesse*'—'His worship shall renew its youth for ever,' said poor Renan, out of his profound agnosticism. It is even so, and in a sense which Renan could not know. He thought only of an idyllic memory, the Galilean peasant-prophet. We adore the Son of God, who liveth and abideth for ever. HE 'renews His youth for ever' in His true followers, living in them. 'Notwithstanding, the Lord.'

It may seem a sort of anti-climax to come from the martyrs of Rome, and of China, to the level of our common life. But it is not really so. The truest training for 'some great thing' for God comes through fidelity to Him in the next little thing. And *full* fidelity to God in ordinary life is a thing which demands for its achievement nothing less than the secret of the saints, 'notwithstanding, the Lord.'

For this the glorious annals of holy suffering are given us. Not only, not most, to win our loving wonder for the sufferers; still less to set us upon imagining how we ourselves, in their circumstances, might show their spirit; such thoughts are much more likely to weaken than to brace the true courage of the soul. No, the

supreme lesson of these scenes is another. It is the lesson of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, in *all* the necessities of His people.

> 'I ask them whence their victory came;
> They with united breath,
> Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
> Their triumph to His death.'

The witness of the saints is all to HIM. Everything in them, as well as around them, would have failed and forsaken them. 'Notwithstanding, the Lord.' Their glory is to accentuate His Name. They will 'see of the travail of their souls,' if they can but write this large for us in their sacred life-blood, 'Notwithstanding, the Lord.

We in England to-day are threatened neither by a Roman Nero nor by an Oriental Empress-Dowager. But we *are* threatened, day and hour, by all the forces of that darkness into which it is more awful to be led away than to follow the King of Saints to any Calvary outside the gate. Around us are the powers of the Triple Alliance of the pit. Within us is the weakness of the sometimes bewildered mind, the poor ambiguous will, the listening, the parley, the silent invitation to the tempter to come in. And no man can redeem his brother from such hours. And before the crudest temptation, often, the finest culture, the largest knowledge, the most endearing ties, the

pleading of even maternal love, can fly like dust in the wind.

But the Friend of the Martyrs *is* adequate to be the Law, Liberty, Safety, Victory, of His tempted follower. Nothing else, nothing less, will ultimately do for our deliverance and our purity in the common day. But Christ is might as well as right. 'Notwithstanding, the Lord.'

XLVIII

Strangers and Pilgrims

'Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims.' —1 Peter ii. 11.

WE are fast approaching the close and death of another year. 'A few more Sabbaths' now, a very few, 'will cheer us on our way,' and the way will have passed out of 'the dear old year, the good old time,' into another period. The thoughts stirred in the soul by such a recollection are familiar and old-fashioned. But the fashion is old because it concerns the most abiding facts of human life. The thoughts are familiar because they meet the heart not of some men only, but of all men who can think and feel. This mystery of time, these incessant reminders that we are always and inevitably on the move, towards a certain but unseen goal, that

> 'All things are taken from us, and become
> Portions and parcels of the dreadful past;'

that we are dying men in a dissolving world; all this is commonplace indeed. But it is everlastingly significant and impressive. Time, transition,

death, 'and then that vast For Ever'—a million reiterations can never make these things trivial to the soul.

This is a fitting time to listen to St. Peter, as he comes to us with his First Epistle, his 'Letter of Hope,' and talks to us, in his own peculiarly gentle and brother-like way, about time and our passage through it. Let us give him good heed. He is the Lord's own accredited messenger; he brings us a message whose every word is endorsed by his Master. He is also an old man, who has lived many years since he was the eager youth of John xxi., 'girding himself, and going whither he would.' He has long 'kept watch o'er man's mortality.' He speaks to us about time, with both the knowledge and the sympathy which only time can teach. ver. 7, 18

'Dearly beloved, I beseech you.' The words are winning. The old Apostle might, I suppose, take another tone if he chose; he might say, 'I am the bearer of Christ's commission of authority; I am inspired to speak Christ's words; I bid you listen, at your peril.' But he does not choose to speak so. He, once the man of self-confident assertions, is now meek and lowly of heart, having found so much of his Lord's tenderness in his own case. So he prefers to say that he loves us, and has come to beseech us.

The thing which he has in mind as he thus

beseeches is a great thing. 'Abstain from fleshly lusts'; that is to say, from 'desires,' impulses, cravings, prompted by 'the flesh'; that is to say, by that in us which is not subject to the Spirit of God. Such desires may be for things bad and gross. They may be, quite as possibly, for things pure and good, *but which will usurp God's place in our hearts.* In either case, if you see the danger, 'abstain.' Do not trifle, do not parley, but abstain. Keep your hands off, and your eyes, and your thoughts. These things are part of an enemy's strategy. They 'war against the soul.' There is nothing for it but to abstain. St. Peter 'beseeches' us to abstain.

But now, he addresses us in a special character, to persuade us the better. 'I beseech you *as strangers and pilgrims*'; as 'outlanders and temporary residents,' if we may give a more modern rendering. He assumes us to be Christians indeed, who have 'believed through grace,' and who now belong to the Lord, and are 'joined to Him.' As such, we are this; strangers and pilgrims. That thought is to make us the more easily, the more naturally, and with the more resolve, abstain. It is to be a detaching thought; for the 'fleshly lusts' belong to the scene around us only, and to that scene we do not really belong. It is to be an uplifting thought; for not only do we not belong to this scene—we do belong to another.

This last is the distinctive note of the words, 'strangers and pilgrims.' In exposure to 'change and decay' the man of this world and the Christian are just on the same footing. The worldling is just as much a passer-on as the saint. He can count just as little upon the permanence of his home, his happiness, the objects of his affections. The tree on which *his* nest is built is 'marked to come down,' as much as any other. But to the Christian believer there is this immense difference. He is not merely a passer-on, uncertain of to-morrow. He belongs elsewhere. He is a passenger, to a definite point. 'He seeks a country,' not in a blind, uncertain sense, but as the good ship 'seeks' a distant shore, with chart and compass which can guide her straight to its unseen haven. He is an 'outlander,' because he belongs to a greater, an eternal, Empire. He is a temporary resident, it would not suit him to be permanent, because his 'city-home is in the heavens.' Heb. xi. 14 Phil. iii. 20

'We've no abiding city here;
We seek a city out of sight;
Zion its name; the Lord is there;
It shines with everlasting light.'

Both for St. Peter's immediate purpose, that we may 'abstain from fleshly lusts,' and for the whole purpose of our Christian life, let us often clasp to our hearts those words, 'as strangers

and pilgrims.' Taken aright, they are a glorious inspiration to a life, here on earth, amidst the things present, which shall be one long faithful course of love, duty, service. Their *negative* message will detach us, in heart and sympathy, not from earth, but from earthliness. Their *positive* message will attach us, in a way which can lift and mould, here and now, our whole character, to the eternal home, the city of the saints, the city of the King.

'Strangers and pilgrims.' Read in their true reference, the words are full to overflowing of the blessed prospect of resting and abiding for ever. They point upward, to where those who go
Rev. iii. 12 in 'go no more out.' Let us welcome them, at this solemn season, deep into our souls. So we shall be the fitter for to-day, because of to-morrow. We shall find ourselves the more fully ready for earth's working-hours, because we belong elsewhere, because 'our city-home is in the heavens.'

XLIX

The Restorer of Lost Years

'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.'—Joel ii. 25.

ANOTHER Lord's Day of the closing year is upon us. Let us welcome as our visitor to-day, in this quiet hour, one of 'the holy prophets,' by whom the Spirit spoke of old, and still speaks even to the end.

Joel has had much to say about a vast incursion of locusts, the terror of the pastoral and agricultural East. We will not discuss here, what the expositors have debated at great length, whether Joel's locusts are literal or figurative; some have held them to be only a figure for locust-like 'armies of aliens,' invading the land of the Lord. That question does not affect our simple study to-day. Whatever the locusts were in the prophet's vision, whatever sort of mischief they had done, 'eating up the years,' the promise stands unaffected by that enquiry. The Lord undertakes that the mischief, whatever it was, shall be repaired. 'I will restore unto you the years that the locust hath eaten.' Whether the invaders

were the insect devourers of grass, and leaf, and grain, or whether they were the human devourers of life, and hearth, and home, and state, the All-Sufficient Lord, in wrath remembering mercy, would 'restore the years.' There should be overflowing fertility in the fields, making the tiller's losses more than good. Or there should be a renewal of peace, order, and population, such as had never been before. He who had struck would heal, giving yet better health. He who had cast down would build the ruins again, into a nobler structure.

Without hesitation we may transfer this promise to the sphere of the heart and soul, and claim it
Gal. vi. 16 for every member of 'the Israel of God.' The history of old Israel is, as was said long ago, a vast cartoon of the human heart and its story, above all, of the human heart as the subject of the grace
Gal. v. 17 of God, the field in which 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.'

So here, the locusts stand for all which, in the Christian's life, invades and wastes; the foes to peace and strength which, on the one hand, we have treacherously invited in, or which on the other hand the Lord has permitted or enjoined to afflict us in chastening pain. Is the Christian conscious of such incursions and distresses? Are they such as to make him sometimes think that he is rejected and forgotten? Nay; it he will but

'turn to Him that smiteth' him, there shall be a blessed contrast yet. 'I will restore to you the years.' Isa. ix. 13

What has the locust been in your case, dear friend and reader? If your 'years' have lately seemed bare and fruitless for the Lord, what does conscience denote as the cause? If this past year, perhaps, has been such, a year which you cannot help contrasting with the green and prosperous landscape of some previous years of your converted life, how has it come about? Seldom, if we seriously take the question up, shall we fail of an answer. I remember a time in my own life when a year of rich and well-remembered blessing, deep and solid, was followed by a very 'lean' year, sadly cold and barren. And I am perfectly conscious that the immediate cause was an undue, self-chosen, self-indulgent, devotion of time to a certain mental interest, perfectly pure and good in itself, but *out of keeping with God's work for me just at that season.* It so possessed the mind and interests that not only did prayer and Bible-study suffer, but the common duties of life received a less thorough attention than was right. And so, conscious love to Christ waned, and with it, inevitably, love to the souls of others. And many a secret advantage did the Tempter take, when he found that 'the Prince Emmanuel' was not in full residence in '*the castle*' of 'Mansoul.' It was a

year that the locusts settled upon; the locusts of sin, and then of chastening trouble.

But each heart must answer its own questions here. There are many species of the genus locust. There is greed of earthly gain, or of human applause. There is too keen an appetite for mere comfort, and for the avoidance of toil and pain, physical, moral, or mental. There is unfaithfulness in trusts, little or great. There is a fatal licence to eyes, ears, imaginations, all too ready to trifle with sin. There is cowardice in confession of Christ. There is neglect of secret intercourse with God. There is slackness about His public worship, and His holy day. There is —— let the reader, if need be, fill up the blank with just his own heart's answer.

What shall we do? Anything but despair. Humiliation is one thing; despondency, discouragement, is a totally other thing. Humiliation let us covet, pray for, embrace. Despondency let us bid begone, in the Lord's name, so long as 'the Lord liveth.' With penitent but quite hopeful
Jonah ii. 4 eyes, let us 'look *again*' to Him who can 'restore the years.' When His Israel, when His Israelite,
Micah vii. 18 so turns and looks, 'He delighteth in mercy.' It shall be no grudging pardon, nor an abortive restoration. He will 'restore the years.'

True, there is a sense in which not even the Eternal can reverse a past fact, not because He

is weak, but because He is one with His laws of being. What I did yesterday is for ever done; a thought of untold solemnity. But the Eternal can so deal with us, in view of things done, as to transfigure our repentance into a perfect fountain-head of new blessings. It was so with Peter. Fearful was the locust-death of his religious life on the night of the denial. But the Lord, who brought him back to His feet for an absolute renewal, 'restored the years,' and that in such a sense that Peter rose to a height of loving humbleness and unwearied working love which he had never known before. Let us 'look again.' He will, for us also, 'restore the years.'

May we not lawfully apply the promise also to those sorrows of life which are less directly connected with sin? Have the locusts of time, change, decay, bereavement, 'eaten the years' for you? Fear not. The future is all in the Restorer's hands, and it is full of His resources for restoration. Wait till 'the things not seen' are unveiled. They will contain infinite surprises of recovery, renewal, reunion, as He, in heaven, 'restores the years.'

L

Abounding in Hope

'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.'—Rom. xv. 13.

'CHANGE and decay in all around I see.' Such is the articulate sigh of many a heart, as life moves on and the years hasten to their end. Few readers of these lines can look back upon the now expiring year and see no special illustration of the mournful verse brought home by it to their own hearts. For my own part, as I review the months, they seem full of such messages, particularly in the death-roll of beloved friends. At least five dear lives which were much to my life have passed out of sight this year, and with them have gone many, less near to me, but known and honoured, leaving blanks through which a little more of the cold outer air of 'change and decay' blows in. Nor has death only been at work. Changes of many a sort, public, private, personal, social, have all contributed to the pathetic minor music of mortal life. And I am but a specimen of mankind in this.

How delightful it is to turn from such recollections to 'the Book of Hope'! Amidst the many designations of the blessed Scriptures, I know none more beautiful, none more true, than this, 'the Book of Hope.' About the Bible there is everything that is grave, there is nothing that is melancholy. I mean, of course, nothing in its distinctive message. It speaks of the most melancholy of all things, sin, as no other voice of book has ever spoken. But it speaks of it not in despair or in bewilderment, but to unveil its infinitely glorious remedy in Christ. It speaks of death, but to 'bring life and immortality to light.' 2 Tim. i. 10 It speaks of vast ranges of the past, but to connect them with a golden future. It is full all through of 'everlasting comfort, and good hope.' And 2 Thess. ii. 16. there is nothing on earth but the Bible of which that can be truly said.

Our chosen verse to-day is a first-magnitude star in the Scripture sky, in its constellation of Hope. Let us turn our prayerful thought upon it, and ask it, this December Sunday, for its message about an eternal Spring.

Notice first the precise rendering demanded by the Greek. 'The God of *the* hope fill you with all joy, that ye may abound in *the* hope.'

The Greek '*the*' here, without undue pressure on its significance, tends to define and concentrate the reference of the word hope. And I believe

that here, as well as in many other familiar passages, far more passages than we often realize, the word 'hope' is thus defined, and as it were fixed, in one glorious reference, namely, in a reference to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed Advent of our ascended King, when, no longer in type or mystery, but in a wonderful actuality, 'this same Jesus shall so come, in like manner, as He was seen going into heaven' (see Acts i. 11). It is to this, as I believe, that St. Paul here points the Romans. He prays for them that they may 'abound' in *this* radiant expectation; that it may possess them with a delightful pre-occupation in all parts of their thought and life; that it may flow through their active days and quiet nights, making a blissful difference in everything. That 'bright to-morrow' is to 'make a bright to-day' for them. In danger and persecution, if that should come, in the common toils and troubles which would always come, in the whole intercourse and experience of life, he prays that they may 'abound in the hope.'

As with them, so with us. Nay, more and more so with us. 'Now is our salvation nearer than when' *they* 'believed,' eighteen centuries and a half ago. It is a significant fact in the history of the Church that the 'blessed hope,' instead of fading with time, has come, in these

Rom. xiii. 11.

Tit. ii. 13.

latter days to be a vastly more prominent truth to countless Christians than for ages before. This last century has seen a remarkable development in the prayerful study of the great promise, and in the realization of its glory. Is this accidental? Is it not rather one of the deep, spiritual 'signs of His Coming'? Does it not say to us, more than ever in our day, 'abound in the hope'? And will not such 'abounding' be a marvellous power in our lives to gladden, to animate, to expand, to liberate, and, in the tenderest sense, to solemnize as well?

Then note some other points in this luminous verse.

See the Apostle's double reference to the divine power which alone can fully make this hope 'abound' in us. '*The God* of the Hope,' '*in*' (so literally) '*the power of the Holy Ghost.*' Ultimately, it is a matter not for our mere research, reasoning, or computation, but for the Spirit's work in us. He must quicken, He must teach. He must so 'take of the things of' the returning Lord, 'and show them unto us,' that we shall, by a blessed necessity, 'love His appearing,' with a longing that is the very soul of expectation, and of the 'peace and joy' of such a prospect.

Joh. xvi. 14

2 Tim. iv. 8

Then on the other hand, note well the words, '*in believing.*' The Lord will do His part, in His

own way. Let us, in His grace, do our part, which is, to believe, that is to say, to take His word, and rest upon it, and live in the spirit of men assured. It is not our dream, but His Word. Ponder it, repose upon it, and then from it look upward and look forward. What is hope, hope in the Scripture sense of the word, but faith looking forward, an expectation warranted by the trusted Promiser?

Such be our happy hope, and indeed it will make life happy all over.

> 'Earth is brighten'd, when that gleam
> Falls on flower, and rock, and stream;
> Life is brighten'd, when that ray
> Falls upon its darkest day.'

LI

God Incarnate

'Unto us a Child is born; and His name shall be called, The Mighty God.'—Isaiah ix. 6.

WE are close to Christmas Day. Our Sabbath meditation shall take its colour from that fact. To be sure, no divine obligation whatever rests on the observance of the day. And many Christians (possibly the reader is one) have a scruple in conscience about such observance; a scruple which I would treat with all respect. But I am not now asking any one to observe Christmas Day, though I believe its religious use is more and more frequent among Christians of most of our Churches. I am only taking the nearness of the ancient and widely-kept festival of our Lord's blessed Birth, as an occasion for throwing the glory of the fact of His Incarnation across the shadows of the closing year.

Very simple is the line I follow. I make no attempt to deal in any elaborate way with that mighty mystery, God manifest in the Flesh. That is rather for the theological book, or lecture, or for the careful pastoral teaching given in the Bible-class or Bible-circle. All I would do here in that connexion is just to re-state the essential faith of all

the Christian ages, held by the saints, century after century, with the Bible open before them. The blessed and eternal Son, God the Son of God, 'for us men and our salvation,' 'in the fulness of time,' was pleased to become also Man the Son of Man. One Person, from eternity to eternity, He was pleased now, for the first time, and for ever, to exercise His Personality in two Natures. The Christ, Babe at Bethlehem, Man at Nazareth, at Capernaum, at Calvary, at Olivet, was now always, and with equal truth, God and Man. Born a Child, He was yet the Mighty God. The
John i. 3 Mighty God, He was yet born a Child. 'By Him,' personally, 'all things were made.' He,
Heb. iii. 17 personally, 'was made in all things like unto His brethren.' He grew, He learned, He hungered, was astonished, wept, and died. Yet He was
John xx. 28 'Lord and God,' 'over all, blessed for ever.'
Rom. ix. 5 Now what shall our thought be upon this mighty, surpassing, supreme Mystery? Shall we think at all? Shall we not rather say, with the Christian poet,

> 'Who is equal to these things?
> Who these mysteries can brook?
> Faith with eagle eyes and wings
> Scarcely there may soar and look;
> Thought must seek that height in vain,
> All her musings turn to pain,
> Whelm'd beneath the mighty load
> Of that word, INCARNATE GOD.'

But after all we do not want to soar to the

height where the eternal Sun shines. We only seek to kneel, and worship, and rejoice, where its blessed radiance falls around us on the earth. We only wish to clasp some of the treasures of the fact of the Incarnation, 'for us men.' For we remember that this wonderful Child is not only 'born.' He is 'born *unto us*.'

In that simple view, let us reflect on the infinite store of cheer and peace which the divine Fact contains, in the midst of earth's shadows of sorrow, sin, and death. It has been well said that the festival of Christmas, to those who keep it with spiritual earnestness, carries a blessed message to sorrowing hearts, *standing just where it does*. It occurs, in our calendar, one week before the end of the year. Just as the year dies, if we may put it so, the Lord is born. Just when Nature is painting her great fresco of death, the Living One steps into the scene, and says, 'I am your Life.'

Believer, hail the message, and ask for grace to advance more and more into its blessed significance with advancing years. For the moment, only for the moment, I will put aside from immediate view the grand revealed truth that the primary purpose of our blessed Lord's Incarnation was that He might die:

See *e.g.* Heb. ii. 14

'Taking flesh that Thou might'st die,
Suffering for sin,
Thou dost bring the lost ones nigh,
Purified within.'

That is a precious truth, unspeakably vital to our 'peace and joy in believing.' But, for a purpose, I do not dwell upon it now. For the moment, I go not to Calvary, but simply to Bethlehem. Standing there, kneeling there with the shepherds, what shall we say, as the utterance just now of our thankful souls?

God is made also Man. Therefore, how precious
Ps. viii. 3. to God is man! 'What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?' In himself, apart from Thee,
Ps. cxliv. he 'is a thing of nought.' By himself, by his sin
4 (Prayer Book) and fall, he is a thing of ruin, guilt, and woe. Yet to Thee he is precious, for he was 'created in Thine
Gen. i. 27 image,' and now, wonder of all wonders, Thou hast
Ps. taken his image to Thee. O man, art thou thus 'His
cxxxv. 4 peculiar treasure'? Rejoice, believe, and love.

God is made also Man. Therefore, what
Is. xl. 7 purposes for Man must God have, hidden in Himself! Yes, let Man seem for the present like the withering grass, like the fading flower. The Incarnate God is the living and everlasting Token that it is not really so. In Him who has joined
1 Joh. iii. Manhood to Godhead in one Person, 'it doth
2 not yet appear what' Man 'shall be.' But it *doth*
Rev. xxi. appear that he shall, in Christ, 'inherit all things.'
7 The Lord of all things has become one with Man.

LII

The Old Christian's Best Friend

'To your old age I am He.'—Isaiah xlvi. 4.

THIS is the last Sunday of the year. Let us address ourselves to the reflections it suggests to those who have lived far into life. Some of the readers of these short meditations may be actually aged, in the stricter sense; far past the threescore and ten of the Psalmist, and now living on into their 'borrowed years.' Very many more of us have not yet lived so long, yet long enough to have tasted deeply of the mysterious cup of time. We look back upon childhood, perhaps with that peculiar and pathetic clearness of vision which memory often possesses; and it seems to us like a journey to another planet. We walk again in the old world, amidst the old walls and trees; we hear again the beloved voices hushed so long, and see the very expression of the faces of the blessed ones. We feel the sensation of the old life, in its ancient joys and griefs. And then we awake broadly to the present. Can we be the same beings, in personal identity, as

know that the beauty, the glory, of their remembered lives had their GOD for its secret and its heart, so that without Me they could not possibly have been what they were? Then, do you remember your own first real heart-knowledge of Me, the blessed 'Christian spring' of the first faith in Me, and the first love to Me? Well, *I am He.* In my divine Personal Identity, *I am He.* All that I was to your fathers, all that I have been to you, I am. Since those old days the world has changed, and the Church; and you have changed, more than you know, except at the heart of your nature and in the deepest of your needs. But I am the same, yesterday and to-day. I am your oldest Friend, and I am also the Friend most present to your newest moment and all its conditions. For I am eternal, and I am yours.

O blessed, heavenly, glorious, faithful Intimate of His people! To those who know Him, that 'utmost solitude of age,' of which the poet sadly sings, is impossible. They 'walk with infinite companionship around them.' For beside them, to the last, is their GOD in CHRIST, saying to them, 'I am He.'

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